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EDITED BY A. NORMAN JEFFARES


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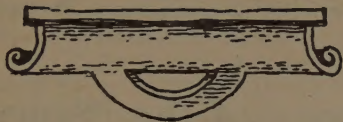
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A REVIEW OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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EDITOR: A. NORMAN JEFFARES

Professor of English Literature at the University of Leeds

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Editorial

FIELDING claimed in *Tom Jones* to be the founder of a new province of writing and therefore at liberty to make what laws he pleased. Two centuries and a decade later, there are, as Mr. Gransden reminds us in this number, no rules. Fielding thought then that the laws of writing were no longer founded on the practice of writers but the dictates of critics; Mr. Gransden is disturbed now by criticism of contemporary novels while acknowledging the difficulties which impede our estimation of what is worth reading, or, rather re-reading. How far, then, has the novel progressed?

In part this number is an attempt to suggest some answers. Despite continuing debates about the novel's demise, the presses pour out novels, and there are readers and writers in plenty, and would-be writers desirous of writing at least their one novel. For writing a novel is still an effective way of portraying experience, of conveying ideas. But now that the general level of novel writing has crept higher, now that technique is catching up with inventiveness and inspiration we naturally demand more of those who are to top the flood.

It is not easy now, if indeed it ever was, for novelists to see life steadily and see it whole, and we pay various prices for specialisation: we sacrifice plot, for instance, for Joyce Cary's imaginative range; Miss Compton-Burnett delivers her ripostes on stilts; *The Diplomat* peters out in distant sands; Linklater's muse puts on too much weight for lighthearted sex; Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* lays on too much sex to be a weighty contribution. Yet he is more readable, because more technically competent than Mark Rutherford, as Linklater is than Smollett; as Aldridge dramatises diplomacy more effectively than Disraeli displayed politics; or as Miss Compton-Burnett is more competent to explore the comedy of evils than, say, Fanny Burney.

The older novelists against whom these contemporary novelists (chosen at random from recent reading) have been summarily juxtaposed are, of course, usually classified as relatively unimportant compared to novelists upon whose greatness we would presumably agree, such as Dickens or Henry James. But they are surely none the less worth reading? Equally, contemporary novelists should not be condemned because they fall short of some critic's demands that the novel should do this or do that. Literature is comfortably large: what we find wanting in one novel may be supplied by another. Jane Austen lets her heroes work off-stage; but Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage* spotlights the perennial problem of the careers of young men as they come to terms with the Establishment of their day.

In an age when the level of technique has risen, then, we must beware of whoring after mere novelty. The gimmick in the flood may be but a haystack carrying the writer to oblivion; the raft which can land lesser as well as greater writers among the ever-living is made of integrity of purpose as well as sheer skill in writing. We must ask *why* as well as *how well* a novel is written. We should be less affected by fashion, more ready to admit and defend our personal likings and dislikings; there are plenty of writers forgotten or unnoticed by fashion who are worth exploring. We are not always students spoon-fed on the best: reading the silver age latinists or even the writers of romances labelled (almost pejoratively) Alexandrian doesn't necessarily hinder our appreciation of Homer the story-teller or Virgil the serious-minded moralist; indeed it may help us to appreciate them the more. Classicism, so ably defended by Mr. Gransden, may have its own dangers of exclusiveness; what matters is that any novelist, whatever his depth of sensibility and imaginative response, whatever his creative skill with words, should give us, in a way of which Fielding would approve, insight into man.

A.N.J.

Thoughts on Contemporary Fiction

K. W. GRANSDEN

THERE is never very much serious criticism of contemporary art or literature. Standards of value tend to emerge in terms of, and in relation to, the works of a generation earlier: it is, for instance, now possible to get some sort of critical agreement, to see where we stand, as regards Joyce but not Beckett, O'Neill but not Tennessee Williams. Books come out so quickly and in such numbers that there is, at best, time only to review them (in the technical sense of that verb). And reviewers, however conscientious, do not always have time to be critics. Standards fluctuate and vary. Reviewer's sometimes temper the wind to the shorn (not slaughtered) lamb. They discuss climates with the wild confidence of meteorologists faced with the English weather. It is no wonder that in this process positions are thinly held, change hands often; that reputations are sometimes made unjustifiably and sustained by a kind of emperor's-clothes conspiracy in which the cold wind of truth is seldom allowed to blow. No one likes to offend in haste; and often, the thing that ought to be said would take too long to look for, so the thing that *can* be said is substituted.

II

The metropolitan literary set-up comes in here, though it is not as important as some have made out. A writer's reputation can be built up from a partiality out of all proportion to his real merit, and sustained by accretions of that same partiality, by a sort of snowball effect (it is hard for people to admit or revise past errors of judgment).

I am not saying that no contemporary reputations are deserved, or that time is going to prove everybody wrong about everybody.

Merit may be recognised at any time, even when it emerges; or it may not. Perhaps on the whole a kind of very rough justice is done. But it is fairly obvious that we don't always get things right. For instance, Gissing's *New Grub Street*, recently reprinted as a World's Classic, can be much more easily seen as a masterpiece now—after Orwell—than it could in the 'eighties. Or take the immense Alexandrian novels, jewels five hundred pages long, of Mr. Durrell. To what aspect of our decadence does the vogue for these belong?

Then one ought to consider—though critics rarely do—the whole question of the so-called popular novel, the Book Society choice. Nevil Shute's novels, for instance, are best-sellers. They are certainly neither pretentious nor inflated. Indeed they are admirably sincere and effective pieces of narrative; and their author's heart is obviously in the right place. Yet Mr. Shute was not a 'serious' writer for the highbrow. More should be written about this fascinating question of the difference between the ready-made and the made-to-measure book. It raises all sorts of interesting social and psychological questions. Why do people prefer the ready made, the finished article? For it is exactly that; when you get to the last page you have finished, and so, till next time, has the author. Nothing survives beyond the last page. It is far less absurd to ask 'How-many-children-had-Lady-Macbeth' questions about Shakespeare than it is to ask them about any 'popular' novel. Or, to be more accurate, we may ask about a Shakespeare play or Dostoievski novel, not 'What happened next?' but 'What really did happen, after all? And why?' etc. 'My words echo thus in your mind . . .' The element of mystery, or persistence, of that which is finished and yet never finished, is the quality which distinguishes the work of excellence. This is why we can read such a work again and again. The great writer creates as well as inventing, and generates in a few hundred pages enough creative energy to 'work' for years to come in thousands of minds. The ready-made writer puts together a Meccano toy—neat, ingenious, but afterwards there is nothing to be done with it except embalm it in celluloid, in a simulacrum of life as unreal as

that in which the corpses are embalmed in Mr. Waugh's 'Whispering Glades'. The book has passed the time; but it cannot pass any more time. It 'lasts' for as long as it takes you to read it. And I should add that this applies even more to many 'highbrow' novels than it does to the middlebrow ones, and it is a silly sort of snobbery which pretends otherwise.

Another interesting phenomenon is the writer who begins as a highbrow and then goes on to middlebrow fame, while continuing (by the process I referred to above) to be regarded as a highbrow: thus having the best of both worlds. Angus Wilson and Iris Murdoch are examples of this, I think, though either of them is capable of proving me wrong at any moment. One has to face the fact that, of a great many novels, written at this or any other time, the critic must ask: yes, but why did he (or she) bother? What difference would it have made if they hadn't bothered? It is only when we can answer 'it would have made this or that demonstrable and describable difference (and the demonstration and the description are the critic's business) to our feelings and knowledge about life' that we are talking about a serious novel.

I am not concerned, nor need anybody be, with the problem of the novelist in competition with television, etc. It is the novelist's own business, and up to his own conscience, what he competes with and how. Nobody makes the rules. There are no rules. There are only novels about which some comment is worth making, and novels about which you cannot make such comments. And the only answer to those who deride such distinctions as subjective is to say that certain great books exist, reproachful sentinels, saying 'I am *The Ambassadors*, *Ulysses*, *The Longest Journey*. Remember me?' And we do remember; so it is silly not to go the next step and ask why. If it has been done once, twice, fifty times very well, then there is no excuse for forgetting. If one accepts standards in the past—what we call classics—then these must be allowed relevance to our own age, otherwise art ceases to be alive and values die. We want the living yeast, not monuments and museum-pieces. Every re-reading of a great book ought to be a nail in the

coffin of the bad book masquerading as good, the clever book masquerading as wise, the smart book masquerading as funny, the lush book masquerading as beautiful.

The novel is of all literary forms the most capacious, and one might say of it, paraphrasing Tacitus, 'capax vincendi, nisi vicisset': its immense popularity, the comparative ease with which one can turn out something, however bad, that can be called a novel, these facts are making the novel, in our time, its own worst enemy.

Yet by a queer sort of snobbery, the mere act of reading, let alone writing, an undistinguished novel is felt to be, in some obscure way, valuable. But bad books are no better than bad films or television programmes. It may be more *useful*, if one is trying to collect data about writing, to read rather than watch pictures; but it is not more virtuous. If we think it is, this is simply the vicarious respectability and distinction conferred by good writers on bad ones.

This is obvious; yet there is a good deal of misplaced sociological concern these days over 'reading', as if this were in itself a therapy: which reminds one of those pathetic objects, table-lamps looking like ships, raffia baskets, produced by mental patients. To those who regard reading as some sort of good-in-itself, regardless of what is read, a good book may look depressingly like a bad one. Tastes change, but do not appear to improve, and only those who believe in the earthly perfectibility of man would expect them to. Think of the idols of fifty years ago: they are on my father's book-shelves still—Deeping, Locke, Caine, Benson, Cannan. Who reads them now? And who expects this year's fashions to wear any better?

At the same time, the basis of taste may be less sure than it used to be, because the moral basis of society is less sure. We are all superficially more sophisticated. We have in common a culture widely diffused by modern inventions, the rudiments of a universal language and universal standards as disseminated by advertisers. But are we kinder, more tolerant (not more indifferent), more unselfish than we used to be? Our society is materialistic,

frightened, casual, self-seeking, petty, conformist. What courage or experiment can we expect in our art? Certainly we have had recently a literature of protest. But it is a slovenly, off-the-cuff affair compared to the lifelong protest of an artist like Lawrence or Joyce. These men were not just angry; they could also write well; they enriched the language so that it was not the same after they wrote. It hardly seems to have been pointed out that the angry novelists of the last decade (I am not concerned with playwrights, and believe that both Osborne and Wesker *have* tried to write) have done little or nothing with the art of writing. A possible exception is Mr. Amis, who took the dead-pan comic technique of the pre-war Anthony Powell a stage further by applying it to new problems of class-consciousness, the 'grammar school toughs', and by holding sticky hands with logical positivism; he tried the social and psychological experiment of writing exactly what he (or his 'honest' hero) meant and contrasting it with what snobs and fools say they mean. But neither in his hands nor those of his imitators has this experiment been carried beyond a limited field of experience or artistic vision. When did we last have a novel which transformed our world, which created a world, instead of merely creeping along behind everybody's dull reality like some seedy Graham Greene private detective, 'shadowing' reality instead of illuminating it?

The arts of publicity and uniformity have so increased their hold on us that it is becoming harder all the time to distinguish the genuine from the phoney, the spontaneous from the contrived, the living from the mechanical. And even those who can in their hearts distinguish are afraid to say so; or no one will let them speak. We are so crazy for reassurance that we even want our criticism to be reassuring. Yes, he is good, isn't he? And the catch-phrases of the coffee-bars, the Sunday-paper snap-judgments (and a *lifetime* of novel-reviewing is something no man should undertake), pass into law: the standards of the literary Joneses, with which we must keep up, to which we must assent, at risk of seeming, otherwise, to belong to another world altogether.

People sometimes complain that politicians are touchier than they used to be, that there could be no Hogarth or Daumier now. This may also be true of art. Criticism plays safe; art plays safe; mutual admiration societies are nice for the ego; but how bad they are for the id.

III

It is perhaps time to have some categories. We could—not because there is any absolute virtue in so doing but because it might help to indicate the different aims of different writers—classify the novel under three headings: (1) the novel of sensibility, exploring character and relationships in the great Austen-Forster-James tradition; (2) the novel of articulation, the ‘novel as gesture’, mud in the face of other people, the universe, etc.: e.g. the first novels of John Braine, John Wain, Amis; some of Joyce; (3) the novel as chronicle. Of course, a novel may belong to more than one of these categories; one may even say that the good novel *will* belong to more than one of these categories. It may belong primarily to one of them, but it will be aware of, and take in, the others. Thus, *The Longest Journey* is a novel of sensibility, yet its great emotional climax, the rapt speech of Ansell in defence of reality as represented by Stephen and against the false as represented by Agnes, is pure articulation; it is a magnificent and beautiful *gesture* towards life and truth, and makes most later ‘protests’ seem shoddy.

Most serious novelists must offer a view of the private man; some (e.g. Galsworthy, Conrad, Snow) also specialise in offering a view of the public man; our own age, technocratic and pre-occupied with patterns of power in business, administration, etc., is especially interested in organisation man: hence the success of novels like *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* and, on a higher level, C. P. Snow, who tries to offer both the private and the public man; perhaps his insights are most true and valuable when applied to the public world, the world of interviews, intrigue, ‘preparing a face to meet the faces that you meet’, the whole remarkable apparatus by which the hypocrisies inseparable from power are operated. I don’t think this shift of emphasis from the private to

the public man in fiction is at all a bad thing; Bagehot said 'the trouble with most writers is that they don't *know* anything', and all the attempts to explore what a man is should not persuade us that what he does is unimportant or boring. We should have much more right to be suspicious of his doing nothing. Even Jane Austen's heroes 'looked after their estates', though one feels that their creator remained charmingly vague about what this entailed.

On a less ambitious level, Nevil Shute has done for flying what Snow has done for the academic and Civil Service worlds; indeed, the only criticism of Shute's books is that they do not attempt anything other than chronicling, narration—or that such attempts at exploration as they do make are inadequate (e.g. his love-stories do not rise above the magazine-romance level).

The weakness of the novelists of the second category, the novelists of articulation, is precisely that which Bagehot noted. Everyone by now has had a go at the outsiders, the religious rebels, and I don't want to waste bullets on such well-punctured targets: but the main objection to the books of Messrs. Wilson and Holroyd (I am straying from fiction for a moment, since we have not yet been vouchsafed these writers' novels) is not that they lack sincerity (the ambition to be articulate can be fiercely sincere) or psychological interest; they have both these qualities; what they lack is knowledge; they simply don't know enough, about tragedy, philosophy, religion. What they do know about, but refuse to write about, is the sort of world, values, experiences, described so honestly by Richard Hoggart or Snow or, in his autobiography *Between Two Worlds*, the late J. M. Murry: the dreary effect on the soul of lower-middle-class English upbringings. These beginnings have given them impetus, the desire to escape, to 'get on'; but they have also given them the desire to forget, to start again (hence the attraction to them of total and extreme philosophies, 'existential' living): they seem to arrive at the British Museum Reading Room fully-armed from nowhere, like Athene from the head of Zeus. They do not really want to explore themselves through art. Valéry said that enthusiasm was not an artist's state of mind; one might add that publicity is not an artist's goal.

Writers who play for quick returns are seldom in the long run rewarded. To chronicle a society, or one's own heart, is difficult, and still requires silence, exile and cunning. Of course, writers like Snow are looking back; they are undertaking a *recherche du temps perdu*; this gives their work the correct balance of objectivity and subjectivity, of memory and desire, truth and passion. This is not to say that Proustian *recherches* are always interesting: Anthony Powell's post-war saga seems to me much less good than his immediate pre-war fiction, because it entirely lacks passion; the world it recalls is not just dead, but seems, in the elaborate, ironic pages of *The Music of Time*, never to have lived at all. He has erected a screen of manners between himself and his material. Much contemporary fiction seems to me to be lacking in moral passion, and to be little more than a literature of manners. Manners maketh man; but they do not make literature.

Those who have nothing but the private life to write about, nothing but themselves, must cultivate this life, themselves, with the intensity of a Lawrence, the passionate wit of a Forster, the acquisitive patience of a Joyce. Joyce's experience was narrow, but he dug it deep and went on digging: 'if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of every city in the world'; and if a man can write well, and get to his own heart (which takes time, patience, the love born of despair of everything outside himself, everything he cannot control) then he can get to the heart of every man in the world. To know all cities and all men is the Ulyssean achievement, it is to be what Homer called 'polymetis', which is usually rendered 'of many devices'.

Articulation, too, can triumph, as it does in Mrs. Bloom's monologue or Ansell's great outburst at Sawston School. These rise out of the particular into the universal, on the Daedalian wings, which you have got to trust one day or another if you are ever going to get anywhere in writing.

I have said little about the novel of sensibility, which has had, and continues to have, many distinguished practitioners. This is because I think it is in a period of decadence (this is why one has such sympathy as one has for the articulation-merchants).

Sensibility has become (despite Dr. Leavis's gallant attempts to make it a serious criterion of value) a synonym for 'fine writing', the fancy dress of earlier and more spacious days. Style as value has become, in fact, style as manners. A number of dutifully-praised, highly competent and craftsmanlike writers, continue to turn out novels of sensibility which seem to me curiously old-fashioned; elaborate stylistic exercises, they could not be done better; you only wonder why they are done at all. It is difficult to speak of values in connection with such writers, because the world they explore has been explored already, and the changes they have found since James and Forster went there do not seem important enough to justify so many well-chosen words. The novel here is becoming a five-finger exercise, and the author is like an Edwardian photographer, posing his characters carefully, using elaborate curtains, long exposures, the utmost care.

What it comes down to is that though one is prepared, for the sake of entertainment or (for they are so contagious) good manners, to *pretend* belief in the characters and events portrayed, this belief is not compelled by the author but is voluntary on the part of the reader. It is, indeed, becoming dangerously like the sophisticated, sceptical belief we pretend to when we read a detective story. It may be my imagination, but a surprising number of 'serious' novelists seem to me to be getting more and more like Agatha Christie: the values of the Home Counties, the manners of Swiss Cottage, the morals of Earls Court. The theatre has lately been partially rescued from these trivial conventions; fiction still lies largely in their thrall; even novelists who start out by promising originality seem to surrender, by about their third book, to non-literary pressures. John Wain's last novel was a disappointing contrivance, a mock-up of Aldous Huxley; Iris Murdoch's last novel, though a distinguished 'pattern', seemed to be the work of philosopher playing charades. Her first novel, *Under the Net*, was an amusing gesture towards the metropolitan literary underworld: when the hero of that book observed that some parts of London are necessary, others, such as Shepherd's Bush, contingent, the philosopher was nicely at the service of the novelist; lately, the

roles seem to have got reversed; the patterns are pretty but arbitrary; they do not grow on us; we enter, but remain obstinately visitors. Where are the worlds of which we can, and must, have the freedom?

Of all the novelists of sensibility, Henry Green seems to me the most distinguished in the true sense of that word. He leaves far more to the imagination than most contemporary novelists; I think this is because, having far more imagination himself, he is aware of imagination as something things have to be left to, if it is not to perish. His eye and ear are poetic; yet his images are never forced: one remembers the girl's eyes in his masterpiece, *Loving*, 'warm yet like plums dipped in cold water'; or the extraordinary episode of the doves 'kissing' while Nanny attempts a story. There is so little fiction as good as his today that terms of praise, squandered on lesser writers, seem inadequate; yet, having complained throughout this essay I would like to end by praising Green. Once upon a time, about thirty years ago, there was a critic called Cyril Connolly who referred to E. M. Forster (this was soon after *A Passage to India* and no one was to know he had written his last novel) as 'one of our assets, and likely to be one of our glories'. I would like to say this about Green. He uses none of the catch-phrases with which writers, like comedians and copy-writers (from whom they are so often indistinguishable) nowadays compete for our attention; he writes about real people, yet so deftly that he seems to be less 'documentary' writer than choreographer; his wit is the kind which, if you heard it aloud on the stage, would immediately be recognised; he is absolutely original yet never intrudes himself into what he creates. Above all, he writes *novels*: he never ekes out with verbal padding scraps of information about philosophy, bed, drink, Hampstead, Soho, Oxford, which make up the bulk of most fiction. Others may go round the Woolworths of their experience stuffing into a ready-made bag whatever scraps they can pinch when no one is looking. But Green is a true maker. Even when he is artificial, as he has been occasionally, his artifices are his own, they are not interchangeable with the next man's. In an age when novels tend to be

as alike as two pre-frozen, pre-packed, supermarketed peas, he retains that most precious thing, the wayward individual voice. He isn't the only one, of course; but the company to which he belongs is smaller than we think. And his qualities are just those we need to set against the provincial sneers and metropolitan sniggers which are in danger of turning English fiction into a set of charades which dodge the real issues both of literature and of life.

The plain fact about many novels is that their authors offer what they think we want to read, not what they themselves are compelled to discover about life. And when you offer what people want instead of what you yourself truly want, you cease to be a writer and become a copywriter. It is no accident, I think, that in our commercial, materialistic age, literature is coming closer to advertisement. Every writer, of course, has got to sell himself. But he must stand out for his own price. The ultimate valuation of every real writer is that which he himself, after due apprenticeship, is ready to put on his work. Hence the opinions about themselves of Joyce or Lawrence are not arrogance; they are the simple truth; when they realise their own value, they are doing the critic's work for him. And when the critic finds excellence in novels which have none (but only a certain fidelity of idiom), then he lowers the standards both of criticism and of fiction.

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The third number of this Review will be published on the last Monday in July. It will include selections from unpublished letters by D. H. Lawrence, which are the earliest known, with a commentary by Kenneth and Miriam Allott; and articles on Chaucer's *The Squire's Yeoman* by Earle Birney; Sir Walter Raleigh by Peter Ure; on William Collins by E. M. W. Tillyard; on Wordsworth by Helen Darbishire and on W. B. Yeats by William Empson.

Flying Fish

Earle Birney

From the basalt waves we flake
bronzed and blue as dragonflies,
flash into the alien air,
toward the dry and blinding sky,
stall and fall and soar and then
flicker back into our mirror.
Not from zest or blandishment
but from gauzy, fishy terror
we, the sea's most desperate charges,
beat against the bars of light.
Below the finger fuselage
invisible the Monster slides,
huge behind our tautened wingboom
rolls our round eternal Wrath.
Though we taxi herringbones,
from our jungle zoom a fathom,
silently in silken chase
Dolphin twines in shining loops.
No take-off that may quite set loose
our needling fliers from their base,
wingspread none but will be gauged
by His gleaming calipers.

A Note on Ivy Compton-Burnett

D. W. JEFFERSON

EXPLICIT in Miss Compton-Burnett's choice of methods is an ironical sense of the history of the novel. Her art has all the air of a studied adjustment to a period of decline, resisting decline not only by the use of extreme measures. At her best she is a good example of T. S. Eliot's conception of the 'individual talent' in relation to tradition, the tradition which can only be attained with great labour; for her extreme measures consist in the development of an entirely new set of possibilities in the forms of the literary and social past, so that certain elements in the latter are stretched beyond all expectation and enjoy a surprising modernity of function.

She belongs mainly to the literary line of Jane Austen, but her varied technique includes many ingredients from elsewhere. Some of her passages of narrative are in a solemn quasi-biblical style. It is interesting, in the episode of Dudley's flight in *A Family and a Fortune* (Ch. 8), to see the effect of such phrases as 'taking her only nurse and trusting to his aid,' modified by the sharp observation of the words that follow, describing poor Miss Griffin's walk: 'her short, quick, unequal steps, the steps of someone used to being on her feet, but not to walking out of doors, made no attempt to keep time or pace . . .' The stately but off-centre idiom of her servants' hall dialogue ('Tabby, that is rushing in where angels would hesitate') is reminiscent of the garbled English of the socially inferior characters of some of the older novelists. There is a slightly Dickensian flavour in the fictitious tales of family amity with which the nursemaid Mullet beguiles her small

charges in *Parents and Children*, and also in the pathetic wish of Miriam, the plump housemaid in *Manservant and Maidservant*: 'I should like to have a real illness. It seems it might pull me down and make me different.' The formalised word-play which pervades her work has a general affinity with that of Jane Austen's predecessors, the wits of the eighteenth century, though she follows none of them in detail. She inherits their regard for a clear-cut vocabulary and neatness of implication. Her use of a 'set speech' idiom for portentous disclosures takes us back to early conventions of fiction. And the list could be developed further.

What Miss Compton-Burnett inherits from Jane Austen is partly a tradition of literary and social manners. One of the advantages of Jane Austen's vocabulary was that it afforded opportunities for understatement, for the discreet or witty disclaimer. When she says of Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* that he 'fully intended to settle as soon as he could be properly tempted; actually looking round, ready to fall in love with all the speed which a clear head and a quick taste could allow,' she uses words which keep the subject at a certain distance—it is a man's problem—but the effect is far from colourless. In the justly celebrated passage where Emma is left to ponder over the consequences of Mr. Elton's proposal, the comparative ease with which she adjusts herself to what is, after all, Harriet's misfortune ('To youth and cheerfulness like Emma's, though under temporary gloom at night, the return of day will hardly fail to bring a return of spirits . . .') is indicated with great tact. Miss Compton-Burnett's novels abound in passages where a similar use of language enables her to deal satisfactorily and, in the best sense of the word, easily, with aspects of human nature which in our day tend to be exposed to the odiously familiar pressure of popularised psychology:

Something seemed to say that he was single and lived in his childhood's home, and that the continuation of his early life had prolonged his youth . . .

The plainness of the idiom protects human dignity. So striking is the contrast with modern ways of expression that it is often referred to as 'stylised'. It is a tradition of manners but also one of

it. It would be unprofitable to try to distinguish too closely between the two aspects: between moderation of language as a habit of breeding, and the understatement that operates in the use of irony. In the description of the Doubleday family in *Man-servant and Maid-servant* (Ch. 3) monstrosity is shown as something that may go imperfectly recognised as such, protected by a world of commonplace and accepted ways of thought. That Mrs. Gertrude Doubleday is prodigious is stated clearly enough, but by a manipulation of ordinary terms which places the prodigious in its relation with the usual:

They accepted their own content and other people's surprise at it, and their mother's opinion that it had every ground. Gertrude's energy swept over them, and they saw it as they saw any other natural force. They were regarded as devoted to their mother, and shared or accepted the belief. Gertrude did not love her children less than other mothers, but she loved herself more. Personal uses marked her path, and she gained from them impetus and vigour that outdistanced themselves. She was glad that her son was unmarried, as she liked his devotion and the credit of it. Her daughter's she valued less, or regarded as sinking lower, but her unwillingness to see her married did not mar her complacency in being the sole member of the family with full experience. Gertrude was capable of competing with her own flesh and blood. Her zest in her personal life faltered at nothing. With her son's contributions to her household, her income sufficed, and material care played no part in her lot. She said she had cause for thankfulness, and put into the feeling the same vigour as into more instinctive emotions.

Miss Compton-Burnett's novels abound in characters with infirmities beguiling to the modern mind. Her conservative idiom enables her to give a light and pleasing sophistication to her portrayal of them. The following conversation between two women from *Pastors and Masters* (Ch. 3):

'... He couldn't propose to me.'

'Why not?'

'Why, I should think he couldn't. I haven't thought about it. I should think it's one of the things he doesn't do. We all have them.'

'But you could manage yourself, dear. People can,' said Theresa.

'Yes, of course they can. I've noticed that. And he could accept me, I am sure. Now he would spare me embarrassment. Dear William!'

'But he wants to marry you, doesn't he?'

'As much as he can want to marry anyone. Anyone who is a woman. And that is not very much.'

'Oh dear! These dons and people!' said Theresa.

'Yes, it is something of that way. I knew you knew all the time. I might tell you it is that way with me, too . . .'

If we wish to know more about such people as 'cases' we must turn to other writers. Felix Bacon, in his absurd companionship with Jonathan Swift, and Gregory Haslam with his old women, are handled as if psychology and its polysyllabic words had never been invented. The result is a sharpness and engaging simplicity of presentation, and oddity flourishes in all its beauty.

It is a common mistake to dwell excessively on Miss Compton-Burnett's treatment of the obviously piquant and outrageous aspects of human nature. In *Parents and Children* especially, there are beautiful examples of pointedness and control combined with gentleness in normal domestic episodes. Her touch is perfect in the concluding sentences of the following little scene (Ch. 1):

'My days for progress are past,' said Regan.

'I wonder why people say that in such a contented tone,' said Eleanor.

'They may as well put a good face on it.'

'No, grandma, I do not think it is that,' said Luce, tilting back her head to look into Regan's face. 'I think it is just that many things still stretch in front of them, though some may be behind. I think we all go on advancing in ways of our own, until some sort of climax comes, that we all look towards as a goal.' She said the last words lightly, as if not quite sure if she had made or avoided a reference to her grandmother's death, and settled herself in a better position on the floor, to indicate that her thoughts were on trivial, material things.

Regan kept her eyes on her needles, which she seldom did if her thoughts were on them. She was thinking for a moment of her own end. It engaged her mind no oftener as it drew nearer, and it did this so lightly at the moment that it failed to keep its hold.

The main theme of this novel is Eleanor's alienation from her children in the absence of their father, who for a time is believed to be dead. Her maladroitness and confessed defeat, the expressions of irritation, helplessness and compassion of her children, and the grandfather's sharp appeal to them to give her their support,

are the subject of a most admirable page (Ch. 8). Passages like those, with their discriminating appeal to traditional humane feeling, ought to be better known.

The same idiom, as well adapted to reticence as to revelation, equips her to portray the very young. It expresses a keen understanding which respects and deals sparingly with its object. The little episode in *Manservant and Maidservant* (Ch. 3) where a small boy of seven tries to pull a Christmas cracker with his father, who terrifies him, is a touching example of adjustment of scale to the measure of a child's crisis.

All Miss Compton-Burnett's novels contain intelligent characters with habits of thought that may be called 'modern'. Through their penetration and vigilance, manifested in innumerable significant passages of dialogue, she has herself been one of the notable teachers and moulders of attitudes—the attitudes are partly a matter of 'style'—of her age. By placing these characters in a world based on the country-house life of the late nineteenth century, at the same breakfast table with representatives of Victorianism, sometimes at its most untamed, she achieves a formalised, exaggerated and very entertaining version of a familiar clash between the generations. In so far as she is on the side of modern sceptical honesty against entrenched complacency, dishonesty and tyranny, she can be included among novelists congenial to readers of 'progressive' outlook. But the social implications of her art are somewhat complex. For example, the fact that so many of her characters not only do no work but also refrain from having a 'full life' might seem to reflect something inadequate in their class; but it is relevant that these people are often very nice and usually gifted with intelligent self-awareness. The characters who crave for a full life and devour experience, like Mrs. Doubleday, tend to be devourers of other people too. Her art is so ironical throughout that any attempt to extract a straight moral concerning 'class' or 'decadence' from it would be unwise.

Miss Compton-Burnett is far from being the first novelist to succeed by evading the encroachments of certain kinds of realism: those of the human sciences, and of journalism and mass media

generally, together with the less specialised kinds which developed in the nineteenth century; but perhaps no writer has made this gesture quite so pointedly. The peculiar limitations of her art—its spareness, its dryness—may be regarded partly as assets if we see them as an ironical reflection on the age which drives the artist to such disciplines to avoid banality; while its wanton ingenuity, its almost insolent virtuosity, demonstrate the liveliness of its resistance to such an age. The importance of her gesture for us will depend in a large measure on how far we think the novel is in decline, and on how far we associate the decline with the decay of social and cultural forms, including language, and with the growing exposure of the human subject matter to approaches alien to the imagination.

Hymn

from *The Vision of the Prodigal Son*

Sydney Goodsir Smith

Archaic Aphrodite
Lipped by sea
Aulder nor the rocks
Of man's quick destinie

This muse is quietude
A rife solitude
In existence being
Instinct in all things

Archaic Aphrodite
Lipped by sea
Breathe amid the rocks
Enfauld our destinie.

The Girl at the Gaol Gate

FRANK O'CONNOR

THE literature of the Irish Literary Renaissance is a peculiarly masculine affair, and I fancy the same is true of most renaissance literatures. Almost of necessity they are the work of men of action disguised as men of thought, or of men of thought disguised as men of action. In such reckless adventures as donating a backward country with a literature it does not want, women must be left at home, or, at most, be permitted to bring food to the prison gates, because the explosion of a flying bishop can do them so much more damage than it can do to men. A man can live comfortably with little in the way of society, but it is in society that ecclesiastical shrapnel is most effective. Lady Gregory, of course, was so much part of the movement that it is impossible to think of it without her, but it is also difficult to think of her as a typical woman. I think it is Yeats who tells the story of how, when some patriotic soul threatened her with assassination, she provided him with the perfect occasion; someone else tells the story of how when O'Connell Street was cleared by Black and Tan machine guns, the old lady stood alone in the street, shook her fist and shouted 'Up deh rebels!' and I remember myself how when a bishop blew up in her vicinity she merely sniffed and said 'Only anudder storm in a chalice'.

So an Irishman, reading the stories of Mary Lavin, is actually more at a loss than a foreigner would be. His not-so-distant political revolution, seen through her eyes, practically disappears from view. She has written only one story about it—'The Patriot Son'—and from a patriotic point of view that is more than enough. It describes two young men, one a revolutionary, the other a mammy's boy who, despite his mother's scorn, admires the

revolutionary from afar. When the revolutionary attempts to escape from his enemies the mammy's boy tries to shield him, but all that happens is that he rips himself on some barbed wire and meekly returns to the authority of Ma and the local police. What it was all about was apparently the attempted overthrow of the Irish matriarch, a type Miss Lavin seems to dislike, and we may consider it a failure as the matriarch persists. The point of view is perhaps too exclusively feminine, for as the story unfolds a man may be excused for thinking that the mammy's boy is a far better type than the revolutionary, Mongon, and might even feel inclined to pity any matriarch who in future tried to bully him.

But here, at least, the Irishman is on familiar ground, the ground of O'Flaherty and O'Casey. It is only when he turns to the other stories that he gets the real shock, for, though names, details, dialogue seem all of unimpeachable accuracy, he might as well be reading Turgenev or Lyseskov for the first time, overwhelmed by the material unfamiliarity of the whole background, versts, shubas, roubles and patronymics. First, there is the sensual richness, above all in the sense of smell. 'There was a queer pleasure, too, in smelling the children's soiled clothes and Tom's used shirts. Even the smell that would have turned her stomach as a girl had a curious warm fascination for her now, and in the evenings when the diapers were hanging by the fire to dry, with a hot steam going up from them, she shut her eyes and drew in a deep breath, and felt safe and secure and comforted.' Even the word 'diapers' in an Irish story is not more foreign than the feeling of that passage from 'The Inspector's Wife'. And surely, when one first read Russian fiction, there was nothing in it more startling in the way of psychology than this from 'The Nun's Mother':

Women had a curious streak of chastity in them, no matter how long they were married, or how ardently they loved. And so, for most women, when they heard that a young girl was entering a convent, there was a strange triumph in their hearts at once; and during the day, as they moved round the house, they felt a temporary hostility to their husbands, towards the things of his household, towards his tables and chairs; yes, indeed, down even to his dishes and dish-cloths.

As the last Emperor of Russia wrote in his diary on hearing of the Revolution, 'Nice goings-on!' I remember my dear Lady Gregory, and the mighty end of 'The Gaol Gate' and ask myself if this is indeed how most women feel. But then I remember the girl from the North Presentation Convent who came to the real gaol gate with the cake she had freshly baked, in the shopping bag on her arm, and, though she has been practically left out of modern Irish literature, I wonder if in fact this is not precisely how she does feel, and it seems as though a new dimension had been added to Irish literature. 'O'Flaherty, L. *see also* Lavin, M.'

II

Seeing also Lavin, M. seems to raise in a more acute form the problems one had previously thought of only in masculine terms. To a great extent Yeats's early poems and plays had laid down the way that Irish literature must take, but in two books which once seemed to me to have had no real influence, George Moore paved the way for an entirely different sort of literature, and now I am not sure but that they have proved as influential as Yeats's. *The Untilled Field* is a collection of short stories, modelled on Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches* and intended by a Jesuit magazine to provide literary standards for young Irish writers. They began as simple little sketches of country life with no particular moral, but as he warmed to the job, Moore became more and more inflamed by the polemic that was his curse as a writer, and the stories gradually turned into a denunciation of Ireland and Irish Catholicism which was highly unsuitable for a Jesuit periodical. The other book was *The Lake*, a novel about a young puritanical priest who expels his amorous school-mistress from her position, and only when she has emigrated realises that he had acted out of jealousy and was really in love with her himself. In the beautiful close he leaves his clerical attire by the lake to suggest suicide, and swims away in pursuit of the schoolteacher and of his real nature. It is a magnificent theme handled in a finicking and tedious manner—ten years before, Moore, still in his naturalistic phase might have made a masterpiece of it—but it is not the manner

but the last few paragraphs that really raise in final form the problem of Irish fiction. What is settled in *The Untilled Field* has been established once for all by Joyce's *Dubliners* and O'Flaherty's *Spring Sowing*. Moore made the Irish short story a fact. But where are the successors of *The Lake* and how have they developed on and superseded their model? Most Irish novels still tend to end as *The Lake* itself ends, by the hero's getting out of the country as fast as he can. The only Irish novel that compares with it for excellence, Corkery's *Threshold of Quiet*, ends with the heroine's going into a convent, which is only the same conclusion seen through a veil of resignation. There has been no development comparable with the development of the short story, such as would even make it possible for a critic to speak of the Irish novel, and the reason is plain. There is no place in Irish life for the priest or the teacher, no future for them but emigration, as in Moore, or resignation, as in Corkery. In the novel of his I admire most, Peadar O'Donnell describes the wife of a local shopkeeper who secretly supports the young leader of the local co-operative movement in his fight against clerical and shop-keeping interests but who then remains on with her miserable husband. I argued with O'Donnell that she should have run away with the leader of the co-operative movement. O'Donnell replied—quite correctly I fancy—that she would not have done this. I argued—also correctly, I hope—that by this time it didn't matter what she would have done in real life. The logic of the novel had taken over. Neither of us, I think, mistook the other's point of view. We both realised that what I wanted was another version of *The Lake*. I was interested in his two characters as individuals, even if the community lost them. He, the more genuine novelist, was interested in the community and could not take the decision that would deprive it of the sort of men and women he admired. He preferred that life should go on underground.

Now, the short story *can* deal with life that goes on underground. You can write a number of stories about the life of Moore's hero which will ignore altogether the question whether Father Oliver Gogarty's duty to himself and society is not to find

a nice girl and go and live in sin with her in Birmingham, and because our Father Gogartys are often men of great nobility and distinction, you can even write of him with real beauty; but you cannot tell the full story of Father Gogarty's life, which, after all, is the novelist's task, without asking 'Was it worth it?' and the moment this question is asked it must be answered.

If I over-stress this subject it is only because here, or somewhere about here, there should be a workable definition of the novel as an art form—a definition that would be useful to myself as well as to others. If I ask myself whether a series of novels like C. P. Snow's *Strangers and Brothers* would be possible in Ireland I can only reply that I don't for an instant believe it. Why? Because the boys and girls could not gather round George Passant in a weekend cottage, or have love affairs, or discuss politics in public? It is partly that, of course, but only partly, for these are merely circumstances, and circumstances are much the same in most modern communities and merely express themselves in different ways. The real difficulty, as I see it, would be that the narrator of these novels, who is partly Snow himself, though critical of English institutions and attitudes, is still very well pleased with things as they are, with what he regards as his own success, and so, ultimately represents what he and most of Snow's readers regard as a normal attitude to society. George Passant, Snow's finest character, a great man greatly drawn, fails not because of the establishment or because of English provincial smugness or any other possible rationalisation. He fails because of one small, barely visible weakness in himself, and Snow's narrator knows what the weakness is and can isolate it from all the possible accidents that might have accounted for it. An Irish Snow could never have isolated Passant's weakness, partly because the pressures on Passant would be so intense that it would be impossible to detach it from the weaknesses that would be caused by society but even more because the narrator could never have regarded himself as representing normality. On the contrary, he would have realised as Yeats realised that he owed his position to having always been a bit of a freak and been drawn to Passant's weakness as much as to his

strength. I think I understand Snow's point of view much as I understood Yeats's, but I can never imagine Snow saying to me as Yeats once said 'The ethical impulse always breaks the ethical law'. That is to admit oneself a freak.

But this is very much a man's argument. A woman cannot afford to caricature herself as a man may do, and if she does, she is made to pay for it. It is a drawback to the Irish woman writer. But, on the other hand, a woman's ideas of success and failure need not necessarily be the same as man's. No man need regard himself as a failure if he has failed with women, but a woman does so almost invariably if she has failed with men. All through Mary Lavin's stories one is aware of a certain difference in values which finally resolves itself into an almost Victorian attitude to love and marriage, an attitude one would be tempted to call old-fashioned if it did not make the attitude of so many famous modern women writers seem dated. There is in the tone of the narrative even a certain feeling of complacency, not at all unlike that of Snow's narrator, but springing from an entirely different source. Take, for instance, that beautiful story, 'The Will'. Lally Conroy, the bedraggled failure of a well-to-do family returns home for her mother's funeral, to find that her mother had died, still hating her and refusing to recognise her in her will. But Lally is the only one who recognises that it was her mother who was the failure, who alone fears for her salvation, and who insists on having Mass said at once for her and on paying for it out of her own few shillings. It is the bedraggled lodging-house keeper who alone can afford charity. We find the same reversal of values in 'The Long Ago', the story of three girl-friends, one of whom does not marry and continues to dream of how nice it would be if only the husbands would get out of the way and let the three of them be together as they had once been. When the husband of the second woman dies and Hallie, the old maid, breathes this awkward word of comfort to the widow, she projects an atrocious scene, a scene that for me at least weakens the whole effect of a beautiful story. One can see the story easily enough if one translates the values into male terms: the good-natured idler who in comforting his

successful friends for their reverses presumes too much and slights the years of labour and achievement, but the reproof would have been quieter and more crushing. And again, it is the same sense of values that illuminates what I should now choose as probably Mary Lavin's finest story, 'Frail Vessel'. This is the story of two sisters, one of whom marries for convenience, the other for love. The prudent marriage turns out well, the love marriage turns out disastrously, and the frail vessel, Liddy, has to beg from her well-to-do sister who is pregnant. By an exquisite touch of irony Bedelia, the hard woman, can still in feminine terms regard herself as the more successful of the two, but the moment Liddy reveals that she, too, is pregnant, Bedelia's whole façade of success collapses. Even penniless, homeless, abandoned by her ineffectual husband, Liddy carrying the child of someone she has loved is still the dominating figure, and nothing Bedelia can ever do will now alter that relationship between them. It is all very well for Miss Lavin to describe the triumph of a married woman on hearing that a young girl is entering a convent, but I get a strong feeling occasionally that her own rejoicing in the matter is not unlike that of the schoolgirl whose friend and rival in the struggle for the medal for French gets a prize for hockey instead. No more than the rest of us is she free of the Irish weakness for sentimentalising religion, but there is an astringency in her treatment of celibacy which I do not find in any other Irish writer. Sometimes she counterpoints religion and sex, as in 'Sunday Brings Sunday' in which a pregnant little country girl has to listen week after week to the maunderings of a half-witted priest, and 'A Wet Day' a brutal little story which I mistakenly chose to represent Mary Lavin in an anthology of Irish short stories. Here, a parish priest who is a monster of selfishness, complacently congratulates himself on having brought about the death of his niece's young husband so as to preserve his own comfort.

That different set of values means that Miss Lavin is much more of a novelist in her stories than O'Flaherty, O'Faolain, or Joyce, and her technique verges—sometimes dangerously—on the novelist's technique. That has its advantages, of course. In her later stories

there is an authenticity and solidity that makes the work of most Irish writers seem shadowy; not the life of the mind interrupted by occasional yells from the kitchen, but the life of the kitchen suddenly shattered by mental images of extraordinary vividness which the author tries frantically to capture before the yells begin again. ('What Mummy needs,' her daughter once said when some kind friends advised her to marry again, 'is not a husband but a wife.') The only story in which she deliberately eschews the physical world is the fable of 'The Becker Wives' which she sets in a capital city that might be either Dublin or London, and among merchants whose names might be Irish or English, and, for all its brilliance and lucidity it seems to me only the ghost of a story, a Henry James fable without the excuse of James's sexual peculiarities. She has the novelist's preoccupation with logic, the logic of Time past and Time future, not so much the real short story teller's obsession with Time present—the height from which past and present are presumed to be equally visible. Sometimes she begins her stories too far back, sometimes she carries them too far forward, rarely by more than a page or two, but already in that space the light begins to fade into the calm grey even light of the novelist.

She fascinates me more than any other of the Irish writers of my generation because more than any of them, her work reveals the fact that she has not said all she has to say. Between 'Tales from Bective Bridge' published in 1943 and 'The Patriot Son' published in 1956, her stories have developed almost beyond recognition, and with her growing power has come a certain irritable experimentation, as in 'The Widow's Son' where she experiments dangerously with alternative endings and 'A Story with a Pattern' where she experiments with the guying of her audience in the manner of Molière in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*. Her most important work will, I fancy, be neither in the novel nor in the short story pure and simple. In the former she will be defeated by Irish society, whatever standard of values she chooses to judge it by, in the latter because in it she can never fully express her passionate novelist's logic. I should guess that her real achievements

will all be done in the form of the *novella* in which she has done her finest work till now. But it will be a very different sort of *novella*, as different from 'Frail Vessel' as 'Frail Vessel' is from the *novellas* in *Tales from Bective Bridge*, more expansive, more allusive, more calligraphic. In the remarkable group of stories of which 'Frail Vessel' is one, there seems to be the material of a long novel of provincial life, put aside not because Miss Lavin lacked time or enthusiasm but because it would be bound to raise the question I have discussed about the value of lives lived in that particular way, yet which continued to haunt her because whether or not this was life lived as a sensitive person would consider it worth living, it was still life lived, and lived intensely.

To The Madhouse

Edward Lowbury

What she has told us all a hundred times—
That old, unwanted women can again
Be hunted down, accused of pointless crimes
And burned in the public square; that it is vain
To plead—or prove—one's innocence; that men
With solemn looks will come into the house,
And say, fearing a scene, 'You'll feel no pain';
'It's for your good'; 'we're not ungenerous'.
What she foretold, when we dismissed her fear
Saying 'You dreamed such things'—it now comes true:
The door is open, and the men are here.
Calmly they question her, and with a new
Smiling indifference drag her from the room
And through the streets to the expected doom.

Structure and Style in the Novels of C. P. Snow

MICHAEL MILLGATE

IT is evidence of C. P. Snow's increasing reputation both in this country and in America that his first novel, the detective story *Death Under Sail*, first published in 1932, was reissued in 1959 and that his third, *The Search*, first published in 1934, reappeared in a shortened version in 1958. The new edition of *The Search* is especially welcome: the novel is interesting not only for its own sake but because it contains in embryo many themes which have been developed at length in later novels. Snow tells us in the prefatory Note to the 1958 edition that he soon came to see *The Search* as 'a false start' in his ambition to write of people and of 'people in society'; but without the experience gained from *The Search* Snow's conception of the 'Strangers and Brothers' sequence might well have been less ambitious.

When the sequence is complete it will cover a period from 1914 to about 1960: the plan as envisaged by Snow in 1935 involved not only a return to the past but a long leap into the future, and he has subsequently worked out this projection into the unknown with impressive consistency. Including *The Affair* (to be published shortly), eight of the eleven volumes have now appeared. The first of them, from which the sequence takes its name, came out in 1940, the second, *The Light and the Dark*, in 1947; subsequent volumes have appeared at intervals of two years or so. But only since the publication in 1958 of *The Conscience of the Rich*, which should properly be read second, after *Strangers and Brothers*, has it been possible to see clearly the developing structure of the sequence, the design of the whole.

In *Time of Hope* Lewis Eliot is asked what he wants from life. Success, he replies, and adds, after some hesitation, 'I think I want love'. Success and love are the two major themes of the whole 'Strangers and Brothers' sequence, the two principal elements in the 'outer' and 'inner' experience of Lewis Eliot himself. They are themes which cross and interact at many different points: George Passant's disgrace is largely brought on by his relationship with Daphne, Paul Jago's ambitions are fatally injured by the behaviour of the wife whom he adores, Lewis Eliot himself sacrifices his career at the Bar by marrying Sheila Knight. This, however, is only the most obvious of the ways in which, throughout the sequence, Lewis Eliot's outer and inner experiences are played off against each other. In the prefatory Note to *The Conscience of the Rich* Snow observes that, for him, the 'inner design' of the sequence 'consists of a resonance between what Lewis Eliot sees and what he feels'. There is, that is to say, a constant echoing and re-echoing to and fro between the two kinds of experience; each takes on greater meaning and intensity from sympathetic vibrations in the other. Snow's use of the term is illustrated by a sentence near the end of *Homecomings*: 'I was giddy with Margaret's joy, which resonated with mine, so that I could not have distinguished which was which.'

This moment occurs after a crisis in the theme of Lewis Eliot's possessive love for his son. As Snow points out in the Note to *The Conscience of the Rich*, this theme 'resonates' in Mr. March's relationship with his son Charles and in Lewis Eliot's relationship with his brother Martin: it also appears, for example, in Mrs. Eliot's love for Lewis himself. There are many other recurrent themes of this kind: the theme, also mentioned by Snow, of the love of power and the renunciation of power; the theme of the vanity of human wishes and the eternal resurgence of hope; the theme of success and failure—in which failure is seen again and again as the result of that combination of diffidence and 'self-regard' which we see in George Passant, in Mr. March and in his son, in Paul Jago, and, above all, in Mr. Knight and in Lewis Eliot himself:

I knew now how much there was wrong with those who became spectators. Mr. Knight was a spectator of the world of affairs, because he was too proud and diffident to match himself with other men: and I could see how his pride-and-diffidence was as petty as vanity, he would not match himself because they might see him fail. Superficially, unlike Mr. Knight, I was not vain: but in my heart, in my deepest relations, it was the same with me. (*Homecomings*, pp. 228-9.)

Running right through the sequence is the theme of 'strangers and brothers', the division between those characters who give themselves wholeheartedly and unreservedly in their personal relationships, whether of love or of hate, and those who are unable or unwilling to do so. This division separates those who are on the side of 'life' and those who are against it, and is as near as Snow comes to a moral judgement. It is in terms of this division that Lewis Eliot places such a high valuation upon George Passant—with all his faults, uncompromisingly 'a human brother'—while he is unable to accept entirely those like Sir Hector Rose who, with all their admirable qualities, reject intimacy and participation. This feeling is at the root of his affection for Mr. March, who is above all 'a natural man', and of his uneasiness with 'the new men'; it determines his choice between Jago, in all his 'nakedness to life', and Crawford. In *Homecomings* it becomes clear that Lewis Eliot's inner struggle throughout the sequence is to make himself less of a 'stranger' and more of a 'brother' in his relationships, to transform himself from spectator to participator. Snow's conception of human nature requires, and the structure of the sequence demands, that his characters, however different on the surface, should be seen to be in essentials remarkably akin. We have already seen Lewis Eliot underline the galling resemblance between Mr. Knight and himself; in *The New Men* he thinks of his brother's wife Irene and of Nora Luke:

any resemblance seemed like a joke. Nora Luke, dowdy, professionally striving, in the home a scolding faithful housewife—Irene, once notorious for her love affairs, the most reckless of women—yet in secret they had found life difficult in the same manner. At the root of their nature they were sisters. (*The New Men*, pp. 291-2.)

The constant recurrence of such themes gives unity to the whole sequence, a unity which is strengthened both by the coherence afforded by a single point of view and by the skilfully evocative use of a sense of the past, the persistent reference back of scenes, experiences and sensations to similar or contrasting moments in other books, or earlier in the same book. The technique is introduced, quite explicitly, in *Strangers and Brothers*:

I was tired after a day's work, lying on my sofa with a novel, which, when those moments came to have a significance they did not then possess (through the memory of action, so to speak, which is half-way between involuntary memory—recalled for instance by a smell—and that which we force back), I remembered as Thomas Wolfe's first book. The telephone bell rang. It was a trunk call, and among the murmurs, clangings, and whispers of the operation, I had the meaningless apprehension that sometimes catches hold as one listens and waits. (*Strangers and Brothers*, p. 162.)

Wolfe's first book, of course, was *Look Homeward, Angel*, and the telephone call turns out to be a summons back to 'the provincial town' to look after the affairs of George Passant. Snow, through Lewis Eliot, displays a strong sense of the irony or poignancy of coincidence, and the steady accretion of moments such as this—though their significance is not usually dwelt upon so insistently as here—works at once to unify the sequence and to enrich the otherwise austere texture of the writing.

The cumulative effects of this technique reveal themselves at such moments as Lewis Eliot's final joyful, confident return home with Margaret at the end of *Homecomings*: 'We were in sight of home. A light was shining in one room: the others stood black, eyeless, in the leaden night. It was a homecoming such as, for years, I thought I was not to know.' For anyone who has read the earlier novels the passage gains emotive force from the memories evoked of all Lewis Eliot's apprehensive homecomings in the past, while the lighted window sets up a slightly different set of vibrations, recalling the lighted windows not only of Sheila in her terrible isolation but also of Vernon Royce in his. When, a little earlier in the same novel, Lewis Eliot goes to a party the night his

son is born our apprehension is stirred by the recollection that he had gone to parties on the nights when Sheila and Roy had died.

There is also throughout the sequence a network of what are called, in the quotation from *Strangers and Brothers*, 'involuntary' memories, 'recalled for instance by a smell'. Thus in *The Affair* the smell of acacia brings back moments in *The Light and the Dark* and *The Masters*, the two previous Cambridge novels; elsewhere, Lewis Eliot is similarly stirred by the smell of wisteria, of leaves after rain, by 'the late night smell of grass'. In *The New Men* there is a curious moment when Lewis Eliot touches the first plutonium produced by the Barford pile:

I put two fingers on the bag—and astonishingly was taken into an irrelevant bliss.

Under the bag's surface, the metal was hot to the touch—and, yes, pushing under memories, I had it, I knew why I was happy. It brought back the moment, the grass and earth hot under my hand, when Martin and Irene told me she was going to have a child; so, like Irene in the Park under the fog-wrapped lights, I had been made a present of a Proustian moment, and the touch of the metal, whose heat might otherwise have seemed sinister, levitated me to the forgotten happiness of a joyous summer night. (*The New Men*, pp. 239–40.)

This example is more extended and more complex than most—it is related to the theme of possessive love—but the phrase 'pushing under memories' well describes the process always going on in the sequence, especially as the later novels build progressively upon the foundation of the earlier books. Many of these references backwards and forwards depend upon descriptions of the weather. *Strangers and Brothers* is pervaded by fog, the Cambridge novels are dominated by cold, bright sunshine, in *The Conscience of the Rich* the rain is almost as insistent as in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. The weather does not often directly affect the action, nor is it, in any straightforward sense, 'symbolic'. Sometimes it evokes a mood; a change in the weather will often accompany a climax in the narrative; occasionally there is the ironic effect of 'pathetic fallacy' in reverse, as when the sun shines brilliantly in *The Conscience of the Rich* during Anne's nearly fatal illness and at no other time. For the most part, however, the descriptions of

weather are used mainly to 'fix', to 'place' the moment in our minds, and so to prepare the way for its future evocation.

These descriptions take on an unusual importance in the 'Strangers and Brothers' sequence because, in several of the novels, it is almost the only kind of notation that is consistently offered. The texture of Snow's novels is indeed austere; some readers may find this austerity forbidding; but it is clearly functional. The whole sequence depends upon a complex structure of intellectual and emotional cross-references, so that each novel can only be fully understood in terms of all the others: in such a scheme, if the points of reference, memories and images are to be readily evoked without unduly interrupting the flow of the narrative, they must be kept simple and clear-cut.

To Snow the narrative line is all-important. This is at the heart of his rejection of the twentieth-century 'experimental' novel. It may also have largely determined his decision to devote three novels of the sequence—*Time of Hope*, *Homecomings*, and the last volume of all—primarily to Lewis Eliot's inner experiences. This separation leaves Snow free in the other novels to 'get on with the story', so that *The Masters* and, to a lesser extent, *The Affair*, are swept along by a tautness and suspense which make it clear that writing *Death Under Sail* was not, for Snow, a donnish diversion but a deliberate literary exercise.

The novels of inner experience, however, tend to suffer from their abstraction from what the reader inevitably thinks of as the central narrative theme: the story of Lewis Eliot as he pursues his career through many different layers of society. *Time of Hope* has to retrace, however briefly, so much of the ground already covered in *Strangers and Brothers* and *The Conscience of the Rich* that we too often experience, as in a train being switched across parallel tracks, the discomfiting jolt of the points. *Homecomings* is more successful, and contains some of Snow's best writing, but here our sense of the passage of time is distorted by the large gaps which occur in the action. On the other hand, the 'resonance' between what Lewis Eliot sees and what he feels is nowhere stronger or more moving than when—as in the developing relationship with

his brother in *The New Men*—the inner experience emerges directly from the world of outer experience, from the central narrative itself.

For Snow the novels of outer experience depend upon the novels of inner experience. To the reader, however, the relationship sometimes seems to be reversed: the thematic structure is firm and clear, but our sense of 'the story' overwhelms it. That this should be so is partly due to the character of Lewis Eliot himself. Eliot, the reasonable man, serves excellently as a narrator. Not only is he an acute and, normally, a fair judge of men, but we are never allowed to feel that he is completely committed to the situation in which he appears: whether it is the Bar, academic life, the Civil Service, the society of the Anglo-Jewish rich—Lewis Eliot is always firmly *in* that particular world without being entirely *of* it. Unfortunately, his very detachment and judgement hinder our appreciation of the novels dealing with his inner experience. There is, in an entirely non-sinister sense, too much of the Jekyll-and-Hyde about him. Snow is aware of this and uses it skilfully in evoking his 'resonances', but it remains true that Lewis Eliot is more satisfying as an observer than as a suffering individual.

The analysis of his relationship with Sheila, like the presentation of the struggle between 'the light and the dark' in Roy Calvert, is extremely ambitious, but it seems open to question whether Snow's elected austerity of style is wholly adequate to this particular demand. Snow's writing is clear and economical, and in descriptive passages he is capable of vivid and moving effects:

Through the underground corridor of the hospital, which smelt of brick dust and disinfectant, Margaret and I were finding our way to Geoffrey's office. Along the passage, whose walls, as bare as those of a tube railway, carried uncovered water-pipes, went mothers with children. At a kind of junction or open space sat a group of women, their children in push-chairs, as though expecting nothing, waiting endlessly, just left there, children not specially ill, their fate not specially tragic, waiting with the resignation that made hospitals seem like forgotten railway stations littered with the poor and unlucky camping out for the weekly train. Nurses, their faces high-coloured and opaque, moved past them with strong, heavy-thighed steps as though they did not exist. (*Homecomings*, p. 393.)

The dialogue is limited in range, but it has those essentially narrative virtues of brevity and directness which lend such compelling force to Snow's committee-meetings, court-hearings and judicial enquiries. Snow's style is the plain style of statement and exposition: if it does not always seem suited to the analysis of minds overwhelmed by despair and the constant threat of insanity, it is, in its narrative strength, a style entirely appropriate to his major purposes.

There is a passage in *The New Men* which illustrates not only the kind of interrelationship with which Snow is concerned throughout the sequence but also the peculiar combination of strengths and weaknesses apparent in all his writing:

These men were fairer, and most of them a great deal abler, than the average: but you heard the same ripples below the words, as when any group of men chose anyone for any job. Put your ear to those meetings and you heard the intricate labyrinthine and unassuageable rapacity, even in the best of men, of the love of power. If you have heard it once—say, in electing the chairman of a tiny dramatic society, it does not matter where—you have heard it in colleges, in bishoprics, in ministries, in cabinets: men do not alter because the issues they decide are bigger scale. (*The New Men*, pp. 278–9.)

'Men do not alter because the issues they decide are bigger scale': it is not an elegant sentence, it leaves a sense of jaggedness, but it carries an immense, almost Johnsonian, weight of experience of society and knowledge of men. In this experience and knowledge lies Snow's great strength. As a writer, knowing his own limitations, he has cultivated a deliberate austerity of manner. Lionel Trilling, however, has called *The Masters* 'a paradigm of the political life', and Snow compels us to recognise that there is strength in his very austerity, in his determination to keep clear the narrative line, strip away inessentials and present the human situation in naked clarity.

Mr. J. M. Cohen has asked us to correct his description (*A.R.E.L.* No. 1, p. 60) of C. Day Lewis's version of the *Aeneid* as 'shortened', since every line is translated.

Angus Wilson

IAN SCOTT-KILVERT

THERE is a well-known chapter in Henry James's biography of Hawthorne which describes the drab uniformity of American nineteenth-century social life as James saw it, and laments the absence of those institutions and class distinctions which offer the novelist his richest opportunities. In America, Henry James argued, there was no court, no country houses, no cathedrals, no thatched cottages, no public schools, no Epsom, no Ascot! There was not enough show of externals or diversity of manners to make the writer's task interesting. And Professor Lionel Trilling has remarked that the novel was born in response to snobbery, which is a simpler way of saying, as he goes on to explain, that its characteristic function is to record the great expectations of human society—love, money, power and the rest—and to penetrate to the truth which lies behind the illusions. The novels and stories of Angus Wilson are set, one might say, in the bombed-out sites of that stately English social order of James's vision, but this is the kind of fiction and these are the critical counters which come to mind in discussing his work. It is he who has pursued more closely than any of his contemporaries or successors, the conception of the novel as a comic or satirical criticism of manners expressed in naturalistic terms.

He made his debut at a moment when the scene was uncommonly bare of new talent. The year was 1949 and the most promising names in English fiction still appeared to be those of writers such as Anthony Powell or Henry Green who had begun to publish in the previous decade. No new figure of importance had appeared during or immediately after the war, and most of the younger writers who were to make their mark in the 1950's

were barely out of their teens. Mr. Wilson thus stands between the two generations, though in fact rather closer to his seniors. Born at the beginning of the First World War, he is old enough to remember the inter-war years at first hand, and his satire derives much of its bite from the transformation he has witnessed, often a painful process, of the England of his youth into the England of his middle age.

His first book, *The Wrong Set*, made an immediate and a surprisingly powerful impact, surprising, that is, for a collection of short stories, which in Britain rarely reach a wide public. Everyone was well aware by this date, of course, that the British middle class, for so long nurtured on low domestic wages and a host of unconsciously assumed privileges, had received the shaking-up of a lifetime, but the effects of this social upheaval had still to be made articulate in fiction. Here was a new writer, backed by many years of observation (for Mr. Wilson did not begin to write until his mid-thirties), who brought this situation into a sharp if disagreeable focus. The tone of the book besides ushered in a new climate of feeling, already hinted at in the plays of Tennessee Williams, and characterised on the writer's part by a peculiar blend of compassion and disgust, a sense that it is weakness and failure which makes people interesting.

In his early work Mr. Wilson is first and foremost a satirist who excels, in Mr. Cyril Connolly's phrase, in jugular vein, a ferocious chronicler of self-deception in its most up-to-date aspect and vocabulary. His wit draws a great deal of its force from his mastery of dialogue and of the slang of carefully differentiated social groups: no modern writer has succeeded better in capturing the idiom and accent of our everyday talk. He has an unerring ear for the betraying cliché or trick of speech and he makes this a wonderfully sensitive instrument of characterisation. The prime object of his attack is the façade of middle-class values and manners, the hollowness of the respectability, the decorum and the apparently 'progressive' virtues, which can mask hypocrisy, meanness, immaturity exhibited to a pathological degree, and, above all, cruelty.

His satire is closely woven into the fabric of family life with its demands and conformities, which so often conceal the bitterest resentments. It is as if he were conducting the reader around some trim rockery or herbaceous border, which turns out on closer inspection to be planted with nothing but mandrakes and toadstools, docks and darnels. He writes of lonely children who compensate for the absence of their parents' love by weaving dangerous fantasies, of men and women who feel themselves slipping in their jobs, their love-affairs, their social standing, of the embittered, the misfits and the lost. He is a master of the waking nightmare and one of his favourite themes is the 'how did it all happen?' type of story, in which a household is introduced in quite normal terms, and is gradually revealed as nothing more than a whited sepulchre. *Ten Minutes To Twelve*, for example, opens with an imperious ultimatum penned by an elderly business tycoon to his board of directors of his company, but we learn a few pages later that his family has been keeping him under mental observation for twenty years and that the memorandum has just been handed to his nurse.

Each of Mr. Wilson's first two books of stories, *The Wrong Set* and *Such Darling Dodos*, deals in the main with the psychological casualties of middle-class life over the last twenty years, with those who have failed to respond to change or to discover the truth about themselves. The stories are crammed to the brim with realistic detail and yet remarkably economical in their structure, for if Dickens and Zola are Mr. Wilson's masters in his passion for life-like observation, he has also learned from Ibsen: he chooses expertly the moment at which the accumulated tension of years past is on the point of exploding, he is skilful in exposition and possesses a sure sense of climax. He handles his material in two quite distinct modes, the one realistic and closely observed, the other melodramatic. A story such as *Realpolitik*, in which a young, ambitious, thoroughly philistine director of an art gallery takes the measure of his genuinely cultivated but ineffectual staff, is a good example of his 'documentary' style. The other approach is seen at its best in stories such as *Saturnalia* or *Union Reunion*, which

display a thin veneer of refinement cracking in an outburst of vulgarity or hysteria. At its worst it can involve him in the sheer nastiness of *Raspberry Jam*, in which insanity and cruelty are piled on each other apparently to create an effect of horror for horror's sake.

Mr. Wilson has been described, in ironical terms, as a 'humane killer', since his thrusts, although well-directed, are anything but painless. They hurt, as they are intended to do, and not only hurt but degrade, and yet he is evidently a writer who is emotionally involved with his victims. His satire does not attempt the farcical and exuberant invention of Evelyn Waugh, nor the intellectual acrobatics of Nigel Dennis. He does not invite us to laugh at the misdemeanours of some unassailable comic villain such as Basil Seal or Captain Mallet. We are intended to take Mr. Wilson's offenders more seriously, but it is difficult to rouse ourselves wholeheartedly against them. They yield to temptation so easily, betray themselves so inadvertently, in short are so obviously vulnerable, that the reader's feelings are divided between pity, amusement and contempt. The appeal of these early stories depends to a great extent on the skill with which Mr. Wilson holds the balance between these emotions.

Such Darling Dodos, which appeared in 1950, confirmed the impression of Mr. Wilson's mastery of this rather restricted field, but his first novel which was published two years later is an altogether more ambitious venture. In *Hemlock And After* he aims to prove himself not merely a collector of middle-class museum pieces, but an author capable of organising his creations into a social perspective. And since the book takes for its central theme a writer sitting in judgment on his own kind, it is noticeable that he abandons here his hitherto rather ambiguous attitude as a satirist and allows his sympathies to become much more explicit.

The central figure is a distinguished literary man in his public and his private character. Bernard Sands is a successful novelist in late middle age and a well-known figure on left-wing platforms, a kind of English counterpart of André Gide. He sets the seal on his public career when he succeeds in nagging the government of

the day into financing a typically 'progressive' project, the establishment of a Georgian country house, Vardon Hall, as a retreat for young writers. On the private side the picture is less reassuring. As a friend puts it, 'Bernard needs a growing mind to play sand-castles with', and he has allowed himself latterly, for the sake of his 'fuller development' to indulge in the homosexual attachments to younger men which he had repressed in his earlier career. In consequence his wife has undergone a nervous breakdown several years before—and here Mr. Wilson explores a situation he had already sketched with great skill in the story *Et Dona Ferentes*—while his son and daughter are resentful and embarrassed at their father's abnormalities. The Vardon Hall scheme is opposed by a local resident, Mrs. Curry, who has unsavoury designs of her own on the property. Through her sinister activities as procuress to Sands's neighbours she is gradually revealed as a ludicrous yet menacing figure of evil, an arch-priestess of perversion who diffuses her corrupting influence far and wide through the twin agencies of pandarism and blackmail.

Shortly before the opening ceremony at Vardon Hall, Sands witnesses the arrest of a male prostitute. He is appalled by the sadistic thrill which the episode excites in him and overwhelmed by a sense of guilt. He proves quite incapable of formulating the optimistic statement of ideals which is expected of him, and produces an apologia for decadence—'No culture that doesn't accept its own decadence is real'—which baffles and dismays his distinguished audience and comes near to wrecking the entire project. It is an astonishing climax to the book, but it is a climax, to which the title offers a clue.

The title harks back directly to the closing words of Socrates's defence at his trial: 'If you say to me, "This time we shall let you off, but on one condition, that you are not to inquire or speculate in this fashion any more. . . ."—then you must know that I shall never alter my ways . . .', words whereby, in effect, he rejected the noble Athenian lie (or decent English pretence) and chose instead the poisoned cup of freedom. Vardon Hall confronted Sands with a particular moment of choice, but a similar situation might have

arisen at any time in his life. He is a man whose honesty is always likely to spell danger, whose moral frontier also is always perilously exposed: a little later, for example, despite his tolerance of homosexuality, he does not resist his wife when she presses him to denounce and thus cause the suicide of an acquaintance who is attempting to seduce a fifteen-year-old girl.

Hemlock And After is a satire on contemporary corruption, spiritual, intellectual and moral, but a satire in which society is seen neither whole nor steadily. As in his later novels Mr. Wilson musters a large cast of some thirty characters, but for all its apparent variety it is drawn here from two well-defined groups, the professional middle class associated with the world of art and letters, the teaching profession and the civil service, and a parasitic underworld of casual delinquency and organised vice, which battens on the lusts and hypocrisies of its superiors. Two subjects dominate the book. The first is the distaste, and in a sense the unfitness of the liberal intellectual for making his ideals effective. This is a theme which lies at the heart of all Mr. Wilson's writing, and here he sees deeply into the moral inertia to which the liberal humanist is especially prone. The best, as he portrays them, not only lack conviction, in Yeats's phrase, but their virtues are apt to be inseparable from fatal weaknesses. 'Although I know *their* motives to be wrong,' Sands confides to his wife, 'I cannot fight them while I am unsure of my own.'

The second theme is concerned with the nature of homosexual attachments in contemporary society. No English novelist has come to grips with this subject more frankly: Mr. Wilson handles it with complete assurance and his understanding of the problem prevents him from softening the outlines. It is a repellent picture which he offers, made a good deal worse than it need be, he implies, by the existing state of the law, a picture of relationships dominated by self-seeking, insecurity, malice and, above all, fear. The sector of London literary and artistic life which he sketches is seen almost exclusively in these terms and the very clarity of its presentation makes for an obsessive effect. The peculiar horror of this world depends perhaps on its secret society-like character, which embodies

its own code and cryptic vocabulary replete with double meanings. At any rate its repulsiveness is an integral part of the novel's design: a very different type of homosexual relationship, free of these corrupting factors, is described at length in *The Middle Age Of Mrs. Eliot*.

To all appearances the hero of *Hemlock And After* is dragged down by his association with these elements. He dies with his reputation far from vindicated; the Vardon Hall scheme stultifies itself; Mrs. Curry, even after the law has caught up with her, finds plenty of scope for her activities in prison. Yet something of what Sands has upheld with such difficulty survives, and is summed up by his wife in the final paragraph:

'Doing doesn't last, even if one knows what one's doing, which one usually doesn't. But Bernard *was* something to people—lots of people—me, for example—and that has its effect in the end, I think . . .'

Hemlock And After is the most topical of Mr. Wilson's novels and it possesses an urgency of statement and a dramatic impetus which the others lack. Its most obvious weakness lies in the incongruity of its characterisation. The author attempts a variety of modes which differ too sharply to be brought into a common focus. The professional men and the juvenile hangers-on are for the most part carefully drawn from life. Mrs. Sands suggests a Virginia Woolf character, while the egregious Mrs. Curry, after a brilliant start, finally topples over into absurdity. It is true, of course, that the various classes, especially in this kind of society, may intersect at the most unexpected levels, but Mr. Wilson lacks the unity of vision of a Proust to make these sinister juxtapositions sufficiently plausible.

His next novel, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, is cast in quite a different mould, more expansive in design, more genial and relaxed in tone and covering a wider social canvas. 'I see somebody now', says Alice in *Through The Looking-Glass*, peering at the Anglo-Saxon Messenger in the distance, 'but he's coming very slowly, and what curious attitudes he goes into!' In these 'attitudes' Mr. Wilson has hit on an extremely apt symbol for the curious Anglo-Saxon

habit of going through contorted moral gestures, while at the same time pursuing (rather slowly) one's own inclinations. This time his hero is a distinguished mediaeval historian, Gerald Middleton, who has never quite fulfilled his early promise, and the plot is concerned with the consequences of the two-fold lie with which he has lived for forty years, and which has inhibited the proper expression of his gifts. While he was an undergraduate his admired teacher, Professor Stokesay, had made the sensational discovery of a phallic pagan image, buried in the tomb of a seventh-century East Anglian Bishop. Middleton has long entertained a nagging suspicion that this object was 'planted' as a malicious hoax by the Professor's son, Gilbert, a brilliant contemporary of his own, later killed in the Great War, but loyalty has kept his lips sealed. Meanwhile he has married an ogress of sentimentality, a Junoesque Danish blonde, fallen in love with the younger Stokesay's wife and carried on an affair with her for years, before finally sacrificing her to his family obligations. Thus when the story opens, he has alienated his wife and children, driven his mistress to drink and compromised his integrity as a scholar, sufficient cause for him to describe himself as 'a sensualist who has never had the courage of his desires, a sixty-year-old failure and that of the most boring kind, a failure with a conscience'.

Mr. Wilson's plots are often reminiscent of Ibsen's plays, of the unearthing of long-buried domestic skeletons, and the opening chapters of *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* seem to promise an Ibsenesque novel, which will culminate in some scarifying family 'truth-game'. But the exposition is carried out through a long series of flash-backs to the 1920's and 1930's which demonstrate the author's remarkable gift for capturing the feel of a period, but also occupy a great deal of space. By the time the cast of forty-odd characters has been introduced, the interest in the hero's dilemma has been dissipated and is never effectually recovered. He merely upholds the narrative, rather in the manner of the centre-piece of an acrobatic troupe, while the action is carried on in a series of isolated episodes at the periphery. The novel's appeal thus comes to depend on its large and this time extremely varied gallery of portraits. As

in *Hemlock And After* the styles of portraiture are decidedly mixed, but here their incongruity is less disturbing. There is, first of all, the academic tribe of historians, archaeologists and museum officials, who are professionally involved in the great hoax. Here the author, who spent much of his early career as an official at the British Museum, is on familiar territory. The figures he creates out of this apparently unpromising material provide some superb comedy so long as they are regarded as individuals; but the picture he presents of the academic world as a whole cannot seriously claim to resemble any that has ever existed. There is also the by now familiar group of budding spivs, pansies and layabouts, who in their different ways make themselves indispensable to the middle-class world. But the most impressive achievements in the book are its women characters, who include Middleton's whimsical Danish wife, his avaricious French bourgeoisie daughter-in-law, his Dickensian charwoman, and most memorable of all his son's young secretary, a belligerent, derisive Bohemian Britannia, the hammer of culture snobs, the most vital and unmanageable creation Mr. Wilson has yet produced. *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* is clearly designed as a panoramic novel of contemporary society. The plan does not quite succeed because of the inadequacy of the central theme to support so ambitious a structure. It remains, however, a book that is exceptionally rich in comedy and full of brilliant digressions and it represents a further and impressive extension of the author's range.

Nothing that Mr. Wilson had written before could have prepared the reader for his latest book. In *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot* he has shed those elements of the short-story technique which were writ large upon his earlier novels, in particular the speed of narration and the habit of presenting a series of situations rather than developing them. He has also discarded some of the more superficially attractive characteristics of his writing, the topicality, the lethal cut and thrust of the dialogue, the deliberate overstatement, the impression of a non-stop 'performance' to entertain the reader. He has chosen a more universal subject and given it a correspondingly more leisurely, muted treatment.

The book is a study of suffering, of the desolation caused by the death of those closest to us, and once again Mr. Wilson is at his task of dispelling illusions, in this case the illusions produced by material well-being and untried friendships. When we first meet Meg Eliot, she is a woman in her early forties, attractive, intelligent, childless but happily married, with a life agreeably balanced between leisure and congenial activities such as charitable committees and china-collecting. Her husband, a successful barrister, is killed in an attempted political assassination at an Asiatic airport, and Mrs. Eliot is abruptly plunged not merely into widowhood, but into comparative poverty. She possesses wit, charm and adaptability—the plot manifestly demands that she should be allowed enough weapons to put up a fight with her destiny, although these are qualities which Mr. Wilson experiences some difficulty in portraying with conviction. Prised without warning out of the protective shell of money and marital devotion, her problem is to create for herself a new way of life which will satisfy her emotions and intelligence in a world which has little need for a woman of her age and circumstances, and where she soon discovers that she has to fight even for a place on the raft. She tries at first to share a ménage with her closest friends, each of them impoverished women like herself. The price of their intimacy is to conform to their pattern and she rejects each in turn. She discovers also for the first time the sheer impregnability of the fortifications which the younger generation have erected against their elders:

Her generation had treated people as individuals, not bothering about age; these young people were returning to a seclusion as narrow as the secret lives of youth in Victorian times . . .

Her situation is paralleled by that of her brother, a retiring, self-denying pacifist, who runs a nursery garden and quietist community in Sussex, and whose closest friend and partner dies a protracted death from cancer. For a time brother and sister succeed in satisfying one another's needs, but it soon becomes clear to Meg that this relationship merely represents an escape into childhood, another evasion of her real problems, which she must force herself

to break off, and the solution she finally adopts is arrived at, characteristically, only by work and self-knowledge.

Mrs. Eliot is probably more important as a work of transition than as an achievement in itself. There are undeniable longueurs in the presentation of Meg's personality and the supporting figures, harmless oddities for the most part, lack the grotesque vitality we have come to expect of Mr. Wilson's minor characters. What the book does suggest is a significant change of vision. The intellectual rigour of Mr. Wilson's standpoint remains unaltered. Neither Mrs. Eliot nor her brother can accept the consolations of religion in their suffering. The private conscience directed by self-knowledge is their only guide, and Meg in particular is prepared to follow it at any cost. The vital change is to be found in the author's attitude towards human conduct itself. The underlying pattern which his satire has followed in the past has been the exposure of characters whose pretensions far exceeded their true virtues or resources. Here for the first time he is writing of people whose trials bring out hidden reserves of understanding or self-reliance, and this more affirmative approach lends a whole new dimension to his observation.

Mr. Wilson has now been writing for ten years. His early work has not only stood the test of time, it is still from a technical point of view the best he has produced; none of the novels has quite achieved the structural excellence of the best of his stories. His descriptive style has always been the least impressive element in his writing. The pace and compression of the stories imposed on him a suitably clipped, laconic choice of words, but in the wider spaces of the novels his expression, never particularly graceful, lapses all too easily into clichés, redundant phrases and overloaded metaphors. It is a tribute to Mr. Wilson's narrative power that the eye so often passes over these defects and that he is praised for the compulsively readable quality of his prose. Certainly no contemporary novelist has shown himself more skilful at keeping the changing scene constantly within his sights—*Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* has many echoes of the Piltdown scandal, while *Hemlock And After* preceded the Wolfenden Report: in short Mr. Wilson has

continued, as he began, a step or two ahead of his public. He is a writer possessed of a powerful moral sense and it is worth noticing where this has led him. If it was the classic satirical impulse—"Tis hard to write, but harder to forbear"—which first set him writing, there has always been a controlling sympathy behind his indignation which has steadily made its way into the foreground, and this growing human charity has deepened his perception without dulling its edge. His fiction continues to be dominated by a highly critical intellect, but he is now applying this constructively to the universal problems of human conduct. To use the Platonic imagery of *Hemlock And After* one might describe him as a 'corrupter' in the beneficent Socratic sense of one who desires to free the mind only to set it off on a still more difficult quest for virtue. He is a writer who has never halted in his development, and substantial though his achievement already is, one may expect that the best of it still lies ahead.

Horace: Odes I, XXXVIII

James Michie

Boy, I detest the Persian style
Of elaboration, and garlands bore me
Laced up with lime-bark. Don't run a mile
To find the last rose of summer for me,

Nor out of keenness try to refine
On simple myrtle. Myrtle suits both
You pouring, and me drinking, wine
Under the vine's thick, trellised growth.

The Novels of Elizabeth Taylor

ROBERT LIDDELL

SOME of Mrs. Taylor's characters, I believe, give us hints about the way in which she herself looks at the world. It is a delicate and individual vision, which has enabled her to give pleasure to readers at different levels: to the thousands who enjoy the readable, amusing, cosy books, and to the hundreds who care for good writing, and who know it when they see it. In between these two fortunate classes there is a minority, small, I hope, but extremely shrill; it includes a fair number of reviewers. Some of these distrust her work, because it has the good luck to please the many. Some try to persuade us that her work is purely derivative. Sometimes they cite Virginia Woolf, sometimes Elizabeth Bowen, sometimes Ivy Compton-Burnett as her sources. This variety of names indicates the disingenuousness of the charge; a writer who could make a *pastiche* of three so different novelists would certainly be creating something quite new. The more earnest school of criticism finds that her characters are not sufficiently worthy, and the corrupt following of Joyce Cary that too little happens in her novels. A single answer will do for these two objections (which are not very intelligent): a great deal happens in the minds and feelings of these characters who, as fictional characters, have no particular obligation to be worthy—their duty, which they fulfil, is to be interesting. There is only one character, Richard Elton in *A Wreath of Roses*, so worthless that we do not care what happens to him, but he earns his place in the book by his impact on a character who has value.

That Mrs. Taylor's world is largely pictorial, no one would dispute. It is a world observed by someone who never takes it for

one moment for granted, who never stares unseeingly, but takes quick, sharp, fresh glances. Beth, the novelist in *A View of the Harbour*, rarely went out of her house; every time she did, she saw the world with the new vision of the convalescent.

Of Morland Beddoes, in *A Wreath of Roses*, we are told: 'the reason why he saw himself so clearly was that he looked not often, but suddenly, so catching himself unawares.' This is always how things are seen by this writer; Mrs. Taylor reminds one of the imaginative but unphilosophical young man in Mr. Forster's novel who, when discussing idealist metaphysics, was always inclined to think that by glancing over his shoulder suddenly, he could catch a whole world disappearing, or quietly reassembling itself ready for his eye. With such quick glances, herself creating what she sees, she brings into being a world that, perhaps, is unphilosophical, though it is imaginative and idiosyncratic.

There must be temptations to get outside a world that, though so satisfying, may seem at times to be severely limited. In this connection, it is Frances Rutherford, the painter, rather than Beth, the novelist, who typifies this author's powers and problems:

'I committed a grave sin against the suffering of the world by ignoring it, by tempting others with charm and nostalgia until they ignored it too.'

'By looking at one thing, we must always ignore another.'

'How stuffy it is in here!' She was busy lighting a lamp. As the blue coronet of flame reached upwards, her hands guarding it looked transparent.

'I always felt', she said, 'that life's not worth living, that I could only contemplate little bits of it and keep my sanity; and those bits I selected carefully—the sun on a breakfast-table, girls dressing, flowers . . .'

'But it wasn't all happy. Sadness often looked out of those girls' eyes . . .'

'An English sadness. Delicious to contemplate.'

'The picture of Liz on the sofa—she was a woman alone in a room; as only God, I should have thought, could ever possibly have seen her. It was the truth.'

'All little things,' she said impatiently, blowing out a match.

'But *not* little. That *is* life. It's loving-kindness and simplicity, and it lay there all the time in your pictures, implicit in every petal and every jug you ever painted.'

It is Morland Beddoes who is in the right. For him the girl in the picture 'was made to seem perfectly in context as he had never

been able to see people before'. That picture 'turned life a little under his very eyes, put beauty over people in the streets . . . all was radiance; through Frances's eyes could be made static and beautiful and set in a pattern'.

Frances, however, yielded to temptation. "For was I not guilty of making ugliness charming?" she asked herself. "An English sadness like a veil over all I painted, until it became ladylike and nostalgic, governessy, utterly lacking in ferocity, brutality, violence." Her last paintings were not a success.

Mrs. Taylor's reaction to similar temptations has been very different, and very strange; it was also very wise, if it were conscious (and perhaps it was not). She wrote *Angel*, a novel about a violent, self-hypnotised best-selling novelist of the Ouida class. In creating this character, a woman writer as unlike herself as any could very well be, she was able to exorcise the spirit of ferocity, brutality, violence. It is an odd book; even for Mrs. Taylor it is a considerable achievement, but it hardly feels like *her* achievement—there is an anonymity about it, while most of her work is clearly signed. Not that one would attribute it to anyone else; if it had come into my hands without a name, I should have supposed it to be by a very intelligent and highly practised writer whose work, by some chance, I had not yet encountered—a writer who revealed nothing of himself. It is bigger than some of her earlier books, and may be better than some of them; it means less to me and, I believe, to others who particularly value this author's individual vision. *Angel*, herself, is not perfectly in context. But the devils of ferocity, brutality, violence have been fairly faced and, one may hope, routed for good. The later short stories have been all the better for this.

We may therefore look back behind *Angel* with gratitude, and with expectation of further favours. A crisis has been safely passed.

Mrs. Taylor does not seem to me very like Mrs. Woolf or Miss Compton-Burnett or Miss Bowen. Her feet seem to me to be set more solidly upon the earth than theirs; and I do not think that this is better or worse, but that it is different. Let us take a homely example. I have heard it objected that in every book of hers there

is a smell of onions, and that this is intended to show observation. I thought all the world smelt of onions; I should expect a writer to choose a less ubiquitous smell to show observation. And it is not true (and I know them very well) that every one of Mrs. Taylor's books smells of them. Mrs. Woolf must, indeed, have used onions in the famous *bœuf en daube*, but neither she nor Miss Bowen nor Miss Compton-Burnett ever admit to having smelt one—though in her different way each of them conveys that the whole of domestic life (of which onions are a part) is her province. Miss Rosamond Lehmann has also been suggested as one of Mrs. Taylor's models, but she seems to me to bombinate in a vacuum that no smell could ever reach.

Miss Bowen does, of course, alight on earth, and looks round her with immense curiosity when she does, but the idiosyncratic vision of that exquisite artist, which is by no means divorced from ferocity, is so peculiar to herself that no attempt can be made to define it here. Miss Bowen is one of the critics who have done justice to Mrs. Taylor's originality.

For none of the other writers would women's friendship be set in an atmosphere of 'reducing' Turkish baths, or of slapping on cream ('heaving' as one massages under the chin). Motherhood would not, in their books, and it does not occur in Miss Bowen's, involve steaming napkins, or babies smelling of milk. Marriage does not to them mean that you have someone to go to for comfort if the baby wails—someone with whom, at other moments of wanting comfort, you can share a warm fire and 'a lovely murder in the paper'. (It is generous and humane of us men and women of letters, to oppose capital punishment, as we generally do; the aesthetic arguments for it are overwhelming.) None of them would have found, as an objective correlative for an illicit and hopeless love, an uneatable Chelsea bun bravely unrolled by the unhappy, hungry lover in *A Game of Hide and Seek*. Let those who say that her work is constructed out of books and untrue try to swallow this bun. Serve them right if they choke on it:

The shop was empty. The waitress, having thrown coke all over the fire, so annulling it and chilling the room, disappeared through some curtains. They

could hear some over-confident voices and some over-confident dish-washing; and all the time, the phlegmy fog thickened the darkness beyond the windows and enisled them there.

With a great effort, he tried to wrench their evening away from disaster, and leaning forward, pushing aside his plate, said: 'Forgive this horrible place!'

She looked round at the filmed mirrors with advertisements on them, at the green-tiled tables, the antlered hat-stand, the vase of pampas-grass like plumes which had been dipped in the fog.

'It doesn't matter where we are,' she said, and knew this to be true.

This is the sort of scene that Frances used to paint 'with tenderness and intimacy'. And it is the use of this sort of background that prevents the story of Harriet and Vesey from becoming nothing more than a sad, lovely, formally patterned ballet—though it is beautifully constructed. It is as solidly a scene from provincial life as a novel by Balzac or George Eliot. When they meet again after more than fifteen years—they whom we first knew in early youth, when they went to play hide and seek with the younger children, preceded over the grass by their tall shadows—their meetings are in stale tea-rooms and dirty trains, and in front of inadequate gas-fires. An 'English sadness', but too sad to be 'delicious to contemplate'. Some reviewers are impatient with them because they never get to bed together, and feel that their story, therefore, lacks in reality—they forget that a full and real provincial life allows little time and opportunity for adultery.

Mrs. Taylor would not have made any bones about letting Harriet and Vesey make love, had it not been their destiny to be thwarted. In her next book, *The Sleeping Beauty*, a young man so deftly 'takes advantage' of a nurse-maid, that he is almost a model for the intending seducer, who could probably learn as much, practically, from this passage as from the classic early chapters of *Le Rouge et le Noir*. It is also very funny.

For Mrs. Taylor can be very funny indeed, and very robustly funny. This aspect of her work is much neglected by those who write kindly, or unkindly, about her 'infectious melancholy', and her 'delicate, exquisite sensibility'—although some of them admit to a 'gruesome fascination' with her minor characters and their conversation. Frances's 'charm and nostalgia' are not the only

saucy by means of which ugliness can be made palatable—there is also humour.

I do not speak of her comic servants—for here beauty and not ugliness is at the basis of the conception—except to say that these do not belong to the superb, stylised lower classes of Miss Compton-Burnett, nor yet to the strange, hallucinatory uneducated of Miss Bowen. (For Mrs. Woolf, as Mr. E. M. Forster has said, the lower classes hardly existed.) They belong, simply, to the central tradition of English life and letters. There were once, if I remember rightly, prigs who wished to persuade us not to laugh at people who did not have our 'advantages'. It is too much to hope that they have died out, though they seem just now to be quiescent. We may laugh unchecked at incongruity (which is, as Aristotle implies, what is really funny) whether observed in charwomen or in duchesses—and most of us meet more of the former for, fortunately, there are more—though not enough. In a perfect world, whether egalitarian or no, there would, of course, be nothing to laugh at; we may be thankful that we shall not see such a thing on earth. We may also be grateful to Mrs. Taylor for often making us laugh at the incongruities to which Love and Sex give rise, in spite of the following of that great and humourless master D. H. Lawrence, who think the subject so 'holy and beautiful' that they have made it infinitely boring. Humour is never entirely kind; but it is one of the arms we have to use against life which, as Mrs. Taylor implies—though she refrains from rubbing it in—is terrible.

Her happy hunting-ground for the grotesque is among the 'non-U', though she had made it her own before that nomenclature was invented, and before hunting the solecism became a popular parlour-game. Her shop-girls ('sales-ladies') in *A Game of Hide and Seek*, with their extraordinary conversations and their macabre beauty-treatments, ante-date the researches of Miss Mitford and Professor Ross. And in her latest book, in the story *Summer Schools*, she has out-soared them into a 'Gothick' and 'Horrid' world of vulgarity that seems airy and fantastic, though I believe it to be founded on true and sad observation. 'By looking at one thing, we must always ignore another'—I dwell on this

entertaining if minor work, to the neglect of things that are much more beautiful, because too much has been said about her 'delicate, exquisite sensibility'. Here she is being very tough, and not at all squeamish.

The characters in this story have their being, and say their preposterous things, in a décor that Osbert Lancaster or John Betjeman might be proud to have invented. In the dentist's house, for instance:

The ash-trays were painted with bright sayings in foreign languages . . . The parchment lamp-shades were stuck over with wine labels and the lamps were made out of chianti bottles. The motif of drinking was prevalent, from a rueful yet humorous view-point. When Pamela opened the cigarette-box it played 'The More we are Together' and Ursula wondered if the clock would call 'Prosit', when it struck six.

'That's the last patient,' Pamela said. 'Mike will come up panting for a drink.'

Her full skirt, printed with a jumble of luggage-labels, flew out wide as she made a dash to the cocktail cabinet. She was as eager to be ready with everything as if she were opening a pub.

After that, one follows breathlessly behind Mrs. Taylor, eager and yet afraid that her dreadful people will drink one under the table, and leave not *Schadenfreude* but nausea behind. She only just stops in time.

This writer is a pictorial artist, and it is her pictures that most haunt the memory. Things like the cat, in the last-quoted story. 'The shallow arc between the tips of his ears, his baleful stare, and his hunched-up body blown feathery by the wind, gave him the look of a barn-owl.' And we remember the weather in the background, the phlegmy fog, or the rain falling down the window like gin. But many of her people remain three-dimensionally in the memory: the three women, so carefully characterised, in *A Wreath of Roses*, the retired actress in *A Game of Hide and Seek*, the maddening and endearing Angel, and her devoted and admiring friend, the jealous wife and the aristocratic drunkard in *Hester Lilly* . . . She has not, indeed, yet, created a man as fully realised, as manly and as nice as Jane Austen's Mr. Bennet or her Mr John Knightley, but the pathetic, charming, feckless Vesey, a 'brilliant

'Failure' is real all through, and wrings the heart. And Hotchkiss in *A Wreath of Roses*, is probably the most convincing and the most horrible dog in English literature.

I have seen it objected that her people do not act, but merely behave, that they are not moral beings; this objection may well be made about most human beings as well as about most fictional characters at the present time, when there is no accepted common standard. The lack of such a standard is one of the greatest difficulties in the way of a contemporary novelist. A Christian writer, like Rose Macaulay, had a standard for her people; Miss Compton-Burnett, an intensely moral writer, has the standards of late nineteenth-century, upright, liberal, enlightened agnosticism, personally modified, but firmly held. Some recent writers have tried to apply standards that are social rather than ethical, with the consequence that they have been very boring, and have made sad mistakes about individuals. Others, notably Mr. Forster, have tried to elevate a personal aesthetic or mystique into a moral theory, and too often it has wobbled over into sentimentality. It is a great merit in Mrs. Taylor that she has been content to be guided by her moral taste, which is very fine and true, without trying to form a set of principles upon it. One could mention authors who have allowed their characters to be guided by a set of principles which are nowhere current outside the covers of their books.

Great fiction she has not written, and it must be probable that she will not: no living English writer has done so, except Miss Compton-Burnett. But she has written well; she is one of those who are keeping the novel alive and, what is more, by her clean and vital prose she is, in her way, helping to 'keep up English'.

It is very likely that her best work is yet to come; she has surmounted the difficulties of *Angel*, and her last stories show her returning with the vigour and contentment to the world that she has made her own. Limited, perhaps, but in the good sense: 'But *not* little. That is life. It's loving-kindness and simplicity, and it lay there all the time in her pictures.'

The World of William Golding

PETER GREEN

His job', Golding once wrote of the novelist, 'is to scrape the labels off things, to take nothing for granted, to show the irrational where it exists.' The novels he has so far published demonstrate this process in action. Man, Golding is saying, has grown away both from nature and himself; he has become his own God. Nothing can touch him. Golding has made it his task to break down these false illusions: his creed is that of the Delphic Oracle, 'Know Yourself'. He is 'making statements all the time about John Smith, twentieth-century citizen. Writing about schoolboys, Neanderthals and dead sailors appears to him to be a simple means of turning a light on contemporary human nature. He believes the only hope for humanity is self-knowledge, attained and practised by the individual.' In an interview he has also made it clear that the basic problem of modern humanity is that 'of learning to live fearlessly with the natural chaos of existence, without forcing artificial patterns on it. . . . The difference between being alive and being an inorganic substance is just this proliferation of experience, this absence of pattern.'

Earlier he had clarified his position as a novelist with regard to political 'involvement' and modern scientific discoveries:

Current affairs are only expressions of the basic human condition where his true business lies. If he has a serious, an Aeschylean, pre-occupation with the human tragedy, that is only to say that he is committed to looking for the root of the disease instead of describing the symptoms. I can't help feeling that critics of this Aeschylean outlook are those who think they have an easy answer to all problems simply because they have never looked further than the rash appearing on the skin. They want Gulliver to declare himself for one end or other of the egg.

As for awareness of recent discoveries in biology, astronomy and psychology, it is a necessary part of any mind's equipment. . . . [But] to be aware of discoveries need not mean that we over-rate their importance—need not mean that we should picture our flesh under the electron microscope when our real job is to show it *sub specie aeternitatis*. . . .

Golding is, primarily, a religious novelist: his central theme is not the relationship of man to man but the relationship of man, the individual, to the universe; and through the universe, to God.

The symbolism of his novels is, in essence, theological. Both *Lord of the Flies* and *The Inheritors* are concerned with the primal loss of innocence. *Pincher Martin*, as the last chapter proves, explicitly concerns the sufferings of a dead man who has created his own Purgatory. It is a moral axiom of Golding's that man, and man alone, introduced evil into the world: a view which is hardly separable from the doctrine of Original Sin. To a critic who suggested that good was equally an exclusive human concept, he replied: 'Good can look after itself. Evil is the problem.' This attitude suggests both the emotional strength of his work and the intellectual paradox underlying it. He represents himself, theologically, as what used to be loosely termed a Deist; and yet the whole moral framework of his novels is conceived in terms of traditional Christian symbolism.

Nevertheless, the paradox can be resolved. In the first place a novelist with a fundamental moral problem to communicate must be understood by his audience; and to be understood he must use symbols which are familiar and can be readily apprehended. Secondly, Golding is a man in search of cosmological truth; and it might well be argued that—as he himself has often proclaimed in a slightly different context—the names, the labels, do not matter. It is only the ultimate reality that counts, and must at all costs be communicated.

II

The main outline of the plot of *Lord of the Flies* (1954) is by now well known. Somewhere an atomic war is raging and a plane-load of schoolboys land on a deserted tropical island. The setting is

perfect for the re-enactment of that perennial boyhood myth, which found its most famous expression in R. M. Ballantyne's *Coral Island*—primitive life, unhampered by pettifoggery, over-civilised, authoritarian adults.

Since Golding's explicit purpose is to stand the Ballantyne myth on its head, it is instructive to re-read *Coral Island* with this in mind. It was published a century ago, in 1858, at the high tide of Victorian self-confidence, and is permeated with smug national complacency, synthetic missionary fervour, and a kind of paralysing condescension which could only blossom in a safe, stable, unreflecting society. The boys are pint-sized adults, whose priggish conversation is spattered with semi-colons. The social and moral scale of things is clearly delineated: Britons come at the top of it, savages and pigs at the bottom. The boys kill pigs with the same unthinking self-assurance they employ to bully the natives into Christianity, or read them a moral lecture on the sin of cannibalism. The book ends with the burning of the false gods of Mango, and then hurrah for dear old England. Nothing, moreover, is allowed to disrupt the emotional unity of the three boys, Jack, Ralph, and Peterkin. 'There was, indeed', Ballantyne wrote, in a particularly mawkish moment, 'no note of discord whatever in the symphony we played together on that sweet Coral Island; and I am now persuaded that this was owing to our having been all tuned to the same key, namely, that of *love*!' (1st ed. p. 165).

Now it is easy enough to see how a novelist armed with the findings of Frazer, Freud and Piaget could turn this rubbishy myth inside out. *A High Wind in Jamaica* pointed the way; a century of social change lies between Ballantyne's and Golding's position. Mr. V. S. Pritchett both summarised this development and hinted at its further implications:

In *Coral Island* we see the safe community . . . In Richard Hughes's book, we saw the first sign of disintegration: the psychologists have discovered that children are not small fanciful adults, but a cut-off savage race. In *Lord of the Flies* we understand that the children are not cut-off; anthropology, the science of how people live together, not separately, reflects the concern of the modern world which has seen its communities destroyed.

Golding's children, then, are isolated on their desert island for a specific spiritual experiment, much as a scientist might isolate a culture in a Petrie dish; and their behaviour must be considered in the light of their author's known convictions.

At one level *Lord of the Flies* portrays a gradual reversion to the most primitive and bloodthirsty savagery. To begin with, the children impose 'civilised' standards of conduct on their small community. They elect a leader, Ralph. They have a meeting-place for discussions, and a conch-shell to summon them. This conch also becomes a symbol of rational behaviour: no one may speak unless he is holding it. And here, already, the percipient reader gets his first twinge of uneasiness, remembering that a similar habit prevailed among Homer's heroes: these young boys are slipping back on the path that leads to primitivism.

Gradually the shibboleths of twentieth-century civilisation are erased from these middle-class boys' minds. First come irrational fears: of imaginary monsters and the numinous unknown. Then the boys split into two groups: the hunters, and those struggling to retain their civilised standards. The hunters, their initial squeamishness lost, revel in the blood-lust induced by pig-sticking. It is characteristic of the hunters that they loathe and despise those who will not join them. Two of these, Piggy and Simon, are murdered; the third, Ralph himself, is hunted across the island, and only saved by the opportune arrival of a Royal Navy landing-party.

Behind this main narrative structure, as always in Golding's work, we find more universal moral implications. What Ralph weeps for, on the last page, is 'the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart'. Piggy will have no truck with the group-consciousness, and because of this he is killed. Here the book reveals a terrifying microcosm of political totalitarianism. With Simon we are at a deeper level still. Simon is a saint, mystic and clairvoyant. It is Simon, and Simon alone, who sees the others' fear and superstition for what they are. This point is made by the use of two very explicit symbols: the Beast, and the Lord of the Flies himself.

The Beast, to begin with, is nothing more than a focal point for the boys' vague, archaic fears. Later the Beast is given a spurious

reality: the corpse of an airman, still harnessed to its parachute, drifts down from some aerial battle on to the beacon hill at the top of the island. Two children see it in the dark, and instantly the myth of terror is established. But Simon is incredulous: 'however Simon thought of the Beast, there rose before his inward sight the picture of a human at once heroic and sick.'

Meanwhile Jack, whose instinct tells him the Beast must be placated, erects a pole in the forest with a pig's head stuck on top of it as an offering. Simon, walking alone, stumbles on this totemic emblem, buzzing with flies, and instantly, instinctively, knows it for what it is. The more sophisticated reader quickly works out the equation. Baalzebub was the Philistine Lord of Flies; the Jews transmuted his name to mean Lord of Dung or Filth; by the time of the New Testament he was Lord of the Devils, a generalised Satan. It is this potent deity with whom Simon has his strange conversation in the jungle:

Simon's head was tilted slightly up. His eyes could not break away and the Lord of the Flies hung in space before him.

'What are you doing out here all alone? Aren't you afraid of me?'

Simon shook.

'There isn't anyone to help you. Only me. And I'm the Beast.'

Simon's mouth laboured, brought forth audible words.

'Pig's head on a stick.'

'Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!' said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. 'You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you.'

In other words, it is man who creates his own hell, his own devils; the evil is in him.

Armed with this self-knowledge, Simon climbs the hill and sees the rotting corpse for what it is; 'the Beast was harmless and horrible; and the news must reach the others as soon as possible'. But the frenzied hunters will not listen to him: they tear him limb from limb in a ritual orgy. Man, Golding says, cherishes his guilt, his fears, his taboos, and will crucify any saint or redeemer who offers to relieve him of his burden by telling the simple truth. Man's heart is dark, and no innocence lives beneath the sun; or if it does,

it must, inevitably, suffer and die as Piggy and Simon died, their wisdom and virtue destroyed by the Beast's devotees.

All reviewers recognised the power of *Lord of the Flies*, though few worked out its deeper implications consciously. Mr. Golding got beneath their rational guard. But what would he do next? Had he landed himself in a creative *cul-de-sac*? A year later all such doubts were dispelled by the publication of *The Inheritors*.

Once again, Golding set himself the task of standing a traditional *idée reçue* on its head. This time he moved on a little, from old complacency to a new one. In *Lord of the Flies* he had attacked the moral self-satisfaction of Victorian society. In *The Inheritors* he challenged its successor, the progressivism of evolutionary science. No one single man is more closely associated with this movement in the popular mind than H. G. Wells; and it was from Wells's *Outline of History* that Golding took his epigraph, where Neanderthal Man is patronisingly described as an inferior creature who probably suggested the cannibalistic ogre of folk-tale. There is little doubt that he also had in mind Wells's own story¹ of the meeting of Neanderthal Man and *Homo Sapiens* in which all Wells's sympathies are with *Homo Sapiens*, humanity, achievement, discovery, progress. The Neanderthals are huge, half-witted, cruel monsters: one of them steals a human child, and Wells exults in their hunting down and ultimate destruction.

Golding exactly reverses this concept. Here it is the Neanderthals who are creatures of primal innocence: it is the new men, and they alone, who introduce guilt, crime, suffering and conscious ambition into the world. It is clear that there is a close thematic connection between *The Inheritors* and *Lord of the Flies*: Mr. Golding has simply set up a different working model to illustrate the eternal human verities from a new angle. Again it is humanity, and humanity alone, that generates evil; and when the new men triumph, Lok, the Neanderthaler, weeps as Ralph wept for the corruption and end of innocence.

But what most immediately impresses any reader of *The Inheritors* is its atmosphere of immediacy and realism. 'The grisly

¹H. G. Wells, *The Grisly Folk* (*Collected Short Stories*, pp. 607-21).

folk', Wells wrote, 'we cannot begin to understand. . . . As well might we try to dream and feel as a gorilla dreams and feels.' *The Inheritors* gives this statement the lie direct. Striking a superb technical balance between external comment (which permits intellectual glossing) and internal impressionism, Mr. Golding recreates convincingly the Neanderthaler's cloudy, static, non-abstract awareness of life. This is a world where past and future are both little more than extensions of the present; where ideas and communication are a series of separate 'pictures', where neither action nor its corollary, speech, contains any subordinate clauses.

Skilfully Golding introduces his essential clues: the first whiff of the unknown creature on the wind; the sense of kinship with earth; the primal cosmogony, the badness of killing earth's children; at last the contact with the new men. And till the last chapter we see *Homo Sapiens* entirely from the viewpoint of the Neanderthaler. Again the identification with *Lord of the Flies* becomes apparent. These new, bony-faced creatures, Tuami and the rest, hunting, performing magic, placating their devils—what are they but Jack and Roger reincarnate in the backwardness of time? From the beginning their triumph is inevitable; with a last flick of malice at Wells, Golding ends his story by making the New Men abduct a Neanderthal baby. Nothing is solved; corruption is complete; evil and knowledge have triumphed.

The Inheritors can be read as an allegory, at one level, of the Fall; and since Golding himself insists that Lok is a prelapsarian, this is almost certainly how he intended it. Lok and Fa thus become anthropological analogues of Adam and Eve; but it is man himself whom Golding identifies with the Serpent, and who tempts Lok to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. This blazingly heretical version of the Paradisal legend, again, does not seem to have been consciously appreciated by most critics.

Between *The Inheritors* and his next novel, *Pincher Martin*, Golding wrote, unexpectedly, a short satirical novella, *Envoy Extraordinary*,¹ later dramatised as *The Brass Butterfly*. Both novella

¹The plot has close affinities with 'The Rewards of Industry', a story in Richard Garnett's *The Twilight of the Gods*: it concerns a Greek inventor, Phanocles, who comes to the court of an unspecified but highly decadent Roman Emperor with five premature inventions.

and play are an attack on the scientific temperament and the abuse of scientific knowledge. Once again, Golding has indissolubly linked the concepts of human knowledge and human evil. But now we understand, retrospectively, that an additional element has been present throughout his work: the Prometheus myth. Man the maker, the inventor, the builder must suffer for his knowledge. So the scene is set for the third, Aeschylean novel, *Pincher Martin*.

Most critics, with a few honourable exceptions, though they lauded this book to the skies, completely missed its point. In particular, they objected to what was generally described as the 'trick ending'. The entire novel recounts a naval lieutenant's desperate efforts, after being torpedoed, to survive, alone, on Rockall.¹ In the first chapter he kicks off his sea-boots to avoid drowning. On the last page, when his corpse is washed ashore, it is made clear that he was drowned *before* he had time to kick them off. What is the explanation?

'The essential point', John Peter wrote in the *Kenyon Review*, 'is that this is a story about a dead man.'² . . . Mr. W. J. Harvey, echoing this interpretation³ adds that 'the whole action of the novel takes place in the few seconds of his actual drowning or perhaps in some after-death state in which he is given the chance to choose

¹The setting, as well as the central theme, of *Pincher Martin* may have been suggested by Michael Roberts's poem, 'Rockall' (*Collected Poems* [1958] p. 148):

Comforting is sleep, but the comfort fails:
The waves break on the bare rock; the traveller remembers
Shipwreck, the struggle with the waters, the wild climb,
Cries of the wind; and then nothing.

Rockall, two hundred miles west of Benbecula,
Bare rock, eighty-three feet wide, seventy feet high,
First seen by Captain Hall, 1810, reported inaccessible—
The last spur on the Great Atlantic Shelf.

How shall the mind think beyond the last abandoned islands?
The gulls cry, as they cry in the isles of despair,
The waves break, as they break on Tiree or Foula;
Man is alone, and death is certain.

²The American publishers, to avoid any repetition of critical obtuseness, re-titled the book *The Two Deaths of Christopher Martin*.

³*Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (April, 1958), pp. 184-5.

salvation or damnation'.¹ Golding himself writes explicitly 'Pincher is simply in hell'.

Mr. Golding makes it quite clear that Pincher's struggle for survival is not intended to be seen as heroic, but rather as egotistical, in the Hobbesian sense. He is clinging with fierce desperation to his own small, mean pattern of existence. Yet, paradoxically enough, it is just at this point that Pincher—like Milton's Satan—breaks away from his creator's original intention. However despicable his character he nevertheless compels our admiring respect for his epic, unyielding struggle in the face of overwhelming odds.

Indeed, Christopher Martin is more than an individual sailor, suffering on a specific rock: he is a mythic symbol of man's steadfast endurance. He is the much-travelled, long-enduring, crafty Odysseus. He sums up every quality that distinguishes man from the beasts.

To offset this Mr. Golding presents Pincher, in a series of flashbacks, as one of the nastiest characters ever to appear in fiction. For the purposes of Mr. Golding's allegory he has to be: if he were a good man, or even *l'homme moyen sensuel*, he would never have created this hell for himself in the first place.

'Like a dead man!' he exclaims at one point; and of course, he is dead. What Pincher lacks is 'the technique of dying into heaven'; he adamantly refuses to admit the validity of spiritual experience, which Golding himself treats always 'as factual, not illusion'. When God appears to Pincher at the novel's apocalyptic climax, in the guise of the Old Man of the Sea, Pincher cries: 'You are a projection of my mind . . . I have created you and I can create my own heaven.' 'You have created it,' the Old Man replies, with sombre irony. But even then Pincher stands fast. 'I spit on your compassion,' he shrieks, as the black lightning plays about him; and his last words are: 'I shit on your heaven.'

¹This particular device is not new to fiction, which makes its misunderstanding all the more inexplicable. Ambrose Bierce's story of the American Civil War, *An Occurrence at Owl Creek (In the Midst of Life)* (1892) pp. 25-39, provides an exact parallel. A Southerner is being hanged: when he drops—so we are led to believe—the rope breaks, and he swims down-river to safety; in the very last sentence we are made to realise that the whole episode has taken place in the split second between his fall and the breaking of his neck.

This novel suggests the limitations as well as the possibilities of Golding's creative method. *Au fond*, Golding is a religious mystic, for whom the bulk of mankind is fiercely repellent, and in whose eyes only the saint or the prelapsarian—Simon, Lok, Nathaniel—can justify human existence. This has some curious consequences. It virtually excludes the normal range of human relationships which the novel covers. As Mr. Harvey observed, Golding's imagination has always worked at a fair remove from the full body of human life. Only in *Pincher Martin*—and then only by means of flash-backs—is this rule broken; and here, so loathsome is the glimpse given of man's social behaviour, one returns to the bare wind-swept rock with a sigh of relief.

After the publication of *Pincher Martin*, Golding said that he next wanted to show the patternlessness of life before we impose our patterns on it. In the event, however, his new novel, *Free Fall*, avoids the amoebic paradox suggested by his own prophecy, and falls into a more normal pattern of development: normal, that is, for Golding. In the title itself we can at once recognise his two overriding themes, the perennial conflict. Man is doomed by Original Sin; the Fall is a reality. Yet the will remains free: self-destruction is a matter of choice.

This universal moral conflict is crystallised in the mind of one man, Sammy Mountjoy, an English artist. For the first time Golding is presenting us with first-person narrative; and in Sammy we have exactly the type of *l'homme moyen sensuel* which we missed in *Pincher*. Both novels use the same system of flashbacks to unite and give depth to the perspective of a single vision, and both depend on the use of delayed shock-treatment. Only on the last line do we realise fully that *Pincher* is dead; only half-way through *Free Fall* do we become aware that Sammy's present predicament—at the time of thinking, so to speak—is that of P.O.W. officer under interrogation in a Nazi concentration camp during the war. Has he the inner resources necessary to hold out against his tormentor?

The web of memory shuttles to and fro: where was the failure, the wrong turning? It is in solitary prison confinement, alone in

a dark room, that he comes through the truth—the same truth which Simon discovered in *Lord of the Flies*—that all terror, fear, despair are born of the human mind, and the human mind alone.

This new novel is a flawed masterpiece, the inordinately ambitious work of an indisputable genius just missing the centre of the target. Technically, *Free Fall* buckles a little here and there beneath its cumulative weight of symbolism and flashback, the latter occasionally achieving a probably unintentional ambiguity. Here and there, too, the writing, normally so objective and crystalline, blurs a little, as though from sheer intensity of desire to express the inexpressible. The twin problem of loneliness and communication dogs Sammy, as it has always dogged his creator. But for moral sincerity and splendour of vision this novel towers above most contemporary fiction. Sammy is the character through whom Mr. Golding, one suspects, is beginning to be reconciled to the loss of his primal Eden.

It has been suggested by an American scholar that he does not write novels, but fables. There is some truth in this, but not the whole truth. Where most fables and allegories and satires fail is in their lack of individual reality. But Golding has never fallen into this trap. He is intensely, blindingly aware of physical immediacy. This narrowing of focus is Golding's strength; it releases him into cosmic awareness. Despite all his self-imposed limitations, he remains the most powerful writer, the most original, the most profoundly imaginative, to have turned his hand to fiction in England since the war.

A REVIEW OF ENGLISH LITERATURE. Vol. I. No. 4

The fourth number of this Review will be published in October 1960 and will include, among other articles, appreciations of particular aspects of Macaulay by C. V. Wedgwood, G. S. Fraser, John Clive and Eric Stokes.

Fourth Dimension

FRANK KERMODE

M^{R.} DURRELL has been producing a 'word-continuum', 'a four-decker novel whose form is based on the relativity proposition'. What he now calls the 'Alexandrian Quartet' is completed by *Clea*;¹ we have three for space and one for time, though he claims that, having 'the axis . . . well and truly laid down' he can, if he pleases, 'radiate in any direction without losing the strictness and congruity of the continuum'. Still, the great undertaking is complete. We had already seen the events and characters in multiple profile, had had the pleasure of coming upon the same moments, the same gestures and sentences, from many different points of view. In the second volume the 'Inter-linear' of Balthazar took us between the lines of *Justine*; in the third, *Mountolive*, the narrator Darley is reduced to a mere character in a 'straight naturalistic novel' that supplies further corrections to the first two, and also provides the essential political context. The possibilities of further explanation and illumination are no doubt endless, but the most obvious lacunae are filled by *Clea*; for example, the suicide of the novelist Pursewarden is fully accounted for. As one foresaw, it has to do with his love for his blind sister, rather than with the discovery that he had been wrong about Nessim's political activities. There is a parade of familiar characters in new guises, and from a new angle: the lecher Capodistria, supposed dead in the duckshoot of the first volume; Scobie, the comic English Bimbashi, now after his death the object of a popular cult; the ambassador Mountolive, in love with Liza Pursewarden; Balthazar, half-wrecked by a disastrous affair with a Greek actor; Pombal, the amorous diplomat, at last farcically and tragically in love; Justine and Nessim; and Clea, the

¹Lawrence Durrell: *Justine* (1958); *Balthazar* (1959); *Mountolive* (1959); *Clea* (1960), Faber and Faber, 16s. per volume.

young painter who had formerly been a somewhat minor character, once the beloved of Narouz, and the lover of Justine and now of Darley, that the prophecy of Darley's dead mistress Melissa might be fulfilled.

Romantic putrescence is characteristic of the whole trilogy, but *Clea*, a little unexpectedly, takes on a Proustian air—the apples-of-ash taste of Proust's last volume. Once more we pay the usual visit to the child brothel with its décor of apotropaic palm-prints; once more the perversity and cruelty of the city are exhibited; but there is more change, decay and death. Death now comes by water; and the novel is brilliantly and silently stretched out over four images of love and death by water, the first merely a picture of a child diving, the others of the accidental death of Fosca, mistress of Pombal, of the mutilation of Clea, and of a row of dead Greek sailors in an ocean pool. Decay comes in many forms; Justine has had a stroke, Nessim has lost an eye and some fingers in an air-raid; Balthazar is toothless. Only the journalist Keats, back from action in the desert, is an improved man.

Still, all things considered, anything but rapid decay would lack verisimilitude in Mr. Durrell's Alexandria. Its erotic versatility, its many faces of pain and pleasure, appear to provide him with endless matter for his purpose, which is ostensibly the exploration of modern love. Of course he holds that this topic includes all others. 'When a culture goes bad in its sex all knowledge is impeded.' 'Culture means sex, the root-knowledge, and where the faculty is derailed or crippled, its derivatives like religion come up dwarfed and contorted—instead of the emblematic mystic rose you get Judaic cauliflowers like Mormons or Vegetarians, instead of artists you get cry-babies, instead of philosophy, semantics.'

So, naturally, the tetralogy is a highly erotic work—*Clea*, though comparatively simple and changed in tone, is here at one with its predecessors. *Justine* has recently appeared in Italian translation with a lurid cover and a label saying 'Lady erotica'; this is not to be wondered at, and not worth deploring. But one can deplore the effect all this has on the texture of the book. What one disliked about *Justine* was the over-perfumed manner, the

insistence on exotic sin and fatigue, the Huysmans-like neurasthenias, the perpetual straining of the prose to produce dazzle, and the consequent bathos. This impression was strictly qualified by the ironies of *Balthazar* and the cooler prose of *Mountolive*; but with *Clea* one's doubts return. Mr. Durrell frequently writes with a genuinely mediterranean clarity and colour, but he cannot always be lucky, and in the descriptive and in the gnomic he frequently fails. The opening paragraph of *Clea* is badly written.

The oranges were more plentiful than usual that year. They glowed in their arbours of burnished green leaf like lanterns, flickering up there among the sunny woods. It was as if they were eager to celebrate our departure from the little island—for at last the long-awaited message from Nessim had come, like a summons back to the underworld. A message which was to draw me back inexorably to the one city, etc.

'Long-awaited', 'inexorably', are tired. 'Like . . . as if . . . like'—none of these metaphors is more than perfunctory. And the descriptions of the city, the *anus mundi*, heartless, beautiful, ancient, polyglot, poignant, terrifying, diseased, pleasure-seeking, epicene, and so forth, come too often with an air of weariness. The passages of erotic metaphysics, whether aphorisms or dialogues incredibly protracted and literary, one comes to dread. This is true even of the well-written extracts from Pursewarden's notebooks, intended to shock us puritans. Although Mr. Durrell has performed a considerable feat in convincing us that Pursewarden was a far better novelist than Darley, or indeed than Durrell, he cannot always prevent him from seeming tiresome and jejune. Altogether there is a great deal about kisses made more passionate by remorse, there are too many unshed tears, too many people say this kind of thing: 'perhaps our only sickness is to desire a truth which we cannot bear rather than to rest content with the fictions we manufacture out of each other,' following the remark with 'a short ironic laugh'.

Yet it may be said without violence to Mr. Durrell's intention that the heart of his book is not the erotic; that it is, as I have argued before (*London Magazine*, Feb. 1959, pp. 51-55) basically

about art and the artist. Pursewarden is its true hero, and the new Pursewarden material is the core of *Clea*. It is all excogitated, with great persistence, from a radical Romantic myth. Mr. Durrell has put in the centre of his ambitious novel a writer capable of even more ambitious novels of exactly the same kind (and there is a third novelist, Arnauti, to give more density to this handling of the artist). The writer's problem is that the image dissolves in 'the acid bath of words'; he struggles perpetually with 'the failure of words' to support the image; he is a Symbolist, aiming at 'the abbreviation of language into poem'. His concern is with 'the heraldic aspect of reality'. All these new observations confirm the Symbolist position already established in the earlier books. Art is therapeutic but not didactic, and the earlier saying that the artist is concerned with joy alone, but that he must submit to despair, is here repeated. Art says nothing; it 'points, like a man too ill to speak'. Consequently criticism is absurd or obscene, certainly irrelevant; *Clea* strikes Darley only for saying he is thinking of writing a critical book. Now why Pursewarden, who writes a great deal along these lines, should think his beliefs 'strange' is not clear; they are almost entirely orthodox, as derivative as his account of our 'progress from the belly-consciousness to the head-consciousness'. And *Clea*, readable though it is in every page, adds almost nothing to what the other books have promulgated on these topics.

Indeed, despite the shift of attention to *Clea* herself, there is some flagging of invention in this book. For example, the long excursus on Capodistria's black magic seems extraneous to the cabbalism of the earlier books, so well integrated with the political plot. Also, there is the feeling that we are touring determinedly round for the last look at the old faces and places. Also, Scobie isn't as funny as he needs to be. Also, there is the occasional fatigue of the prose, the too-easily evoked decadent odours.

I have blown hot and cold over his work; cold over *Justine*, hot when I saw, with three novels before me, the remarkable patience and skill with which Mr. Durrell was elaborating his chosen myth. About *Clea*, considered alone, I find it hard to be other than cold.

Yet this tetralogy, for all its fatigue-failures, its pretentiousness, its power to irritate, is punctuated throughout by conceptions of astonishing force, from the love-making of Narouz in *Justine* to the dead sailors of *Clea*; and it is an experiment of very great formal interest, a highly serious contribution to modern fiction.

Notes for a Book of Hours

Elizabeth Jennings

Kneeling to pray and resting on the words
I feel a stillness that I have not made.
Shadows take root, the falling light is laid
Smoothly on stone and skin, I lean towards
Some meaning that's delayed.

It is as if the mind had nervous fingers,
Could touch and apprehend yet not possess.
The light is buried where the darkness lingers
And something grateful in me wants to bless
Simply from happiness.

The world dreams through me in this sudden spring.
My senses itch although the stillness stays.
God is too large a word for me to sing,
Some touch upon my spirit strums and plays:
What images will bring

This moment down to words that I can use
When not so rapt? The hours, the hours increase.
All is a movement, shadows now confuse,
Darkening the soft wings of the doves of peace,
And can I tame or choose?

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RICHARD CHURCH

HEINEMANN

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K. W. GRANSDEN is the Literary Editor of *The Listener*; after reading classics at Cambridge he worked on the staff of the British Museum for five years and then freelanced for two years. He wrote a book on Donne in 1954 and his poems will shortly appear in book form.

EARLE BIRNEY, F.R.S.C., is Professor of English at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. He has published four books of poetry and two novels, as well as editing anthologies. He is at present working on *Essays in Chaucer's Irony*.

DOUGLAS JEFFERSON is a Senior Lecturer in English Literature in the University of Leeds. He has written articles on Dryden, Swift, Sterne and Goldsmith, and edited the eighteenth-century volume of the *Pelican Book of English Prose*. He is at present working on Henry James.

SYDNEY GOODSIR SMITH lives in Edinburgh. His most recent book of poems is *Figs and Thistles*. *The Vision of the Prodigal Son* will be published in April, and his play *The Wallace* is scheduled for the Edinburgh Festival in August.

FRANK O'CONNOR is living in the United States; he has taught short-story writing and Irish Literature at Northwestern University and in the Harvard Summer School. He has written many short stories, novels, travel books and critical works. In a recent book, *Kings, Lords and Commons*, he translated poems from the Irish. He is at present working on his autobiography, parts of which have appeared in the *New Yorker*.

EDWARD LOWBURY, who lives in Birmingham, is a bacteriologist working on burns for the Medical Research Council. He has written *Crossing the Line* (1947), is co-author (with Terence Heywood) of *Facing North* (1960), has completed another book of poems, and is working with his wife on a study of Thomas Campion.

MICHAEL MILLGATE is a Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Leeds, who has taught at the University of Michigan. He has published critical articles, is completing a study of the American novel in relation to American society, and is writing a book on the novels of William Faulkner.

IAN SCOTT-KILVERT is Director of the Recorded Sound Department of the British Council. He has published and broadcast many translations of Greek literature, both classical and modern, and his translation of a selection of Plutarch's Greek *Lives* will appear in the Penguin Classics this year. He is the author of a short study of A. E. Housman in the *Writers and Their Work* Series and is preparing an essay on John Webster.

JAMES MICHIE works as chief editor for a London publishing house. He has published one volume of poems entitled *Possible Laughter*. At the moment he is engaged in translating the Odes of Horace.

ROBERT LIDDELL is an author and lives in Athens. His published works include *The Last Enchantments* (1948), *A Treatise on the Novel* (1947), *Aegean Greece* (1954), *The Novels of I. Compton-Burnett* (1955), *Byzantium and Istanbul* (1956), *The Rivers of Babylon* (1959). He is at present working on a novel.

PETER GREEN is a writer who lives in Norfolk. A former Craven scholar and student of Trinity College, Cambridge, he has written *The Expanding Eye* (1953); *Achilles His Armour* (1955); *The Second of Pleasure* (1957); *Kenneth Grahame* (1959). A volume of essays on ancient history will appear this year. He is at present writing a historical novel on the First Sicilian Slave War, a general study of Pompeii, and a text and translation of Juvenal.

FRANK KERMODE, who is John Edward Taylor Professor of English Literature at the University of Manchester, was formerly a lecturer at Newcastle and Reading. His published works include *English Pastoral Poetry* (1952), *Arden Tempest* (1954, 1957), *Romantic Image* (1957), *John Donne* (1957), and he is at present working on *Modern Primitivism*, *English Renaissance Studies* and *Wallace Stevens*. His *Milton Studies* will appear next autumn.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS has published three books of poems. *Poems* (1953); *A Way of Looking* (1955) which won the Somerset Maugham Award; *A Sense of the World* (1958). She edited *The Batsford Book of Children's Verse* (1958). She is writing a book on the relations between mystical experience and the making of poems.

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